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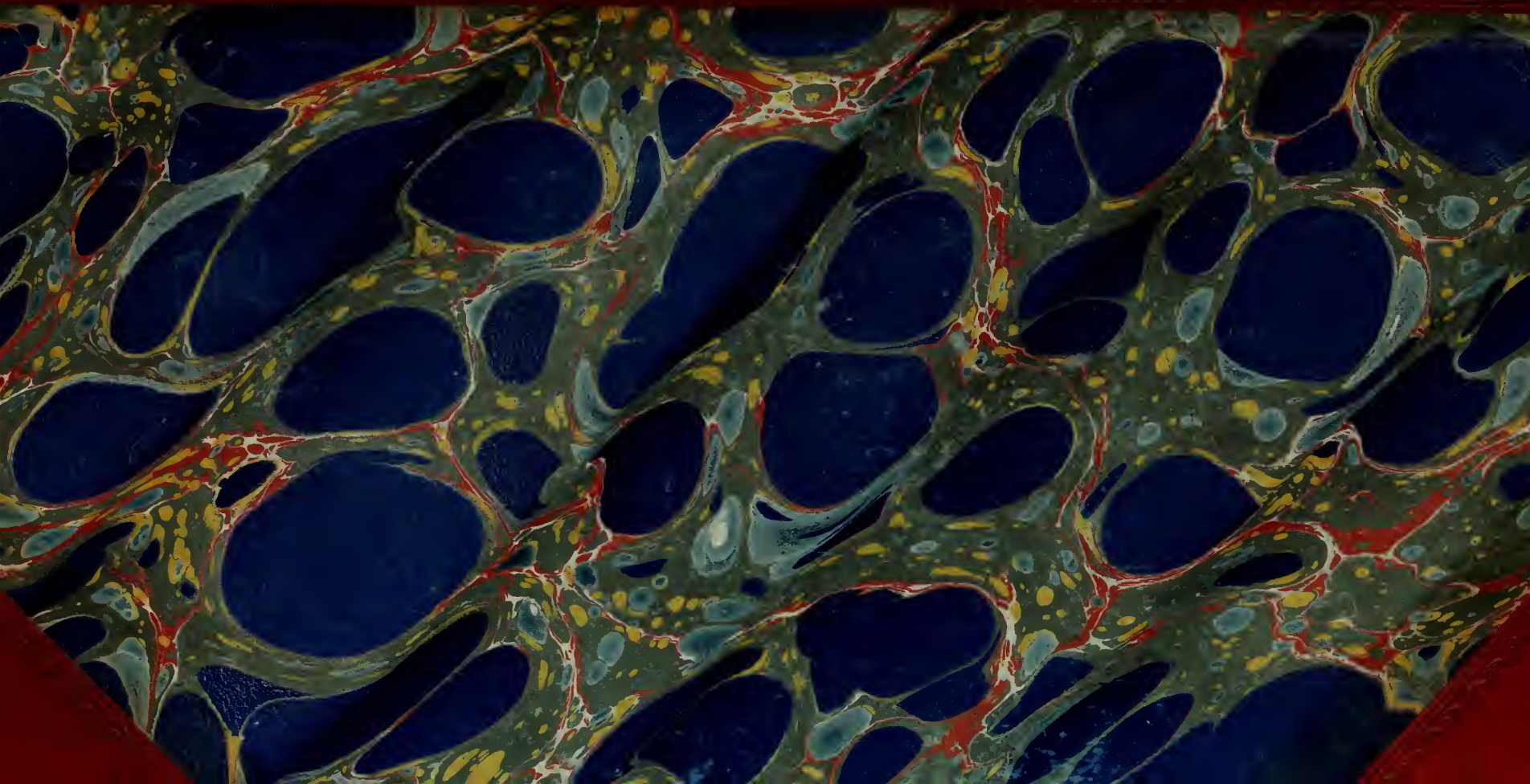

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M. ELLEN STAPLES. J. SWAIN.

"OH, CHARLEY, THEY ARE VERY SWEET," SHE SAID WITH A SMILE; "VERY SWEET AND LOVELY."

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

CHARLES W. WOOD.

VOLUME XLV.

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"Oh, Charley, they are very sweet and lovely."
"Presently she danced in."
"Captain Heriot."
"Lady Level rose with a startled movement."
"She turned to the steward."
"'It is so hot and ugly,' she said."

THE ARGOSY.

JANUARY, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER I.

EARLY DAYS.

I, CHARLES STRANGE, have called this my own story, and shall, myself, tell a portion of it to the reader; not all.

May was quickly passing. The drawing-room window of White Littleham Rectory stood open to the sunshine and the summer air: for the years of warm springs and long summers had not then left the land. The Incumbent of the parish of White Littleham, in Hampshire, was the Reverend Eustace Strange. On a sofa, near the window, lay his wife, in her white dress and yellow silk shawl. A young and lovely lady, with a sweet countenance; her eyes the colour of blue-bells, her face growing more transparent day by day, her cheeks too often a fatal hectic; altogether looking so delicately fragile that the Rector must surely be blind not to suspect the truth. *She* suspected it. Nay, she no longer suspected; she knew. Perhaps it was that he would not do so.

"Charley!"

I sat at the end of the room in my little state chair, reading a new book of fairy tales that papa had given me that morning. He was as orthodox a divine as ever lived, but not strait-laced, and he liked children to read fairy tales. At the moment I was deep in a tale called "Finetta," about a young princess shut up in a high tower. To me it was most enchanting.

"Yes, mamma."

"Come to me, dear."

Leaving the precious book behind me, I crossed the room to the sofa. Mamma raised herself. Holding me to her with one hand, she pushed with the other the hair from my face and gazed into it. That my face was very much like hers, I knew. It had been

said a hundred times in my hearing that I had her dark-blue eyes and her soft brown hair and her well-carved features.

"My pretty boy," she said caressingly, "I am so sorry! I fear you are disappointed. I think we might have had them. You were always promised a birthday party, you know, when you should be seven years old."

There had been some discussion about it. Mamma thought the little boys and girls might come; but papa and Leah said, "No—it would fatigue her."

"I don't mind a bit, mamma," I answered. "I have my book, and it is so pretty. They can come next year, you know, when you are well again."

She sighed deeply. Getting up from the sofa, she took up two books that were on the stand behind her, and sat down again. Early in the spring some illness had seized her that I did not understand. She ought to have been well again by this time, but she was not. She left her room and came downstairs, and saw friends when they called: but instead of getting stronger she grew weaker.

"She was never robust, and it has been too much for her," I overheard Leah say to one of the other servants, in allusion to the illness.

"What if I should not be here at your next birthday, Charley?" she asked sadly, holding me to her side as she sat.

"But where should you be, mamma?"

"Well, my child, I think—sometimes I think—that by that time I may be in Heaven."

I felt suddenly seized with a sort of shivering. I neither spoke nor cried; at seven years old many a child only imperfectly realises the full meaning of anything like this. My eyes became misty.

"Don't cry, Charley. All that God does must be for the best, you know: and Heaven is a better world than this."

"Oh, mamma, you must get well; you must!" I cried, words and tears bursting forth together. "Won't you come out, and grow strong in the sunshine? See how warm and bright it is! Look at the flowers in the grass!"

"Ay, dear; it is all very bright and warm and beautiful," she said, looking over the garden to the field beyond. "The grass is growing long, and the buttercups and cowslips and blue-bells are all there. Soon they will be cut down and the field will be bare. Next year the grass and the flowers will spring up again, Charley: but we, once we are taken, will spring up no more in this world: only in Heaven."

"But don't you think you *will* get well, mamma? Can't you *try* to?"

"Well, dear—yes, I will try to do so. I *have* tried. I am trying every day, Charley, for I should not like to go away and leave my little boy."

With a long sigh, that it seemed to me I often heard from

now, she lay for a moment with her head on the back of the sofa and closed her eyes. Then she sat forward again, and took up one of the books.

"I meant to give you a little book to-day, Charley, as well as papa. Look, it is called 'Sintram.' A lady gave it me when I was twelve years old; and I have always liked it. You are too young to understand it yet, but you will do so later."

"Here's some poetry!" I cried, turning the leaves over. The pleasure of the gift had chased away my tears. Young minds are impressionable—and had she not just said she would try to get well?

"I will repeat it to you, Charley," she answered. "Listen."

"Repeat it!" I interrupted. "Do you know it by heart?—all?"

"Yes, all; every line of it."

"When death is drawing near,
And thy heart sinks with fear,
And thy limbs fail,
Then raise thy hands and pray
To Him who cheers the way,
Through the dark vale.

"See'st thou the eastern dawn?
Hear'st thou, in the red morn,
The angels' song?
Oh! lift thy drooping head,
Thou who in gloom and dread
Hast lain so long.

"Death comes to set thee free;
Oh! meet him cheerily,
As thy true friend;
And all thy fears shall cease,
And in eternal peace
Thy penance end."

"You see, Charley, death comes not as a foe, but as a friend to those who have learnt to look for him, for he is sent by God," she continued in a loving voice as she smoothed back my hair with her gentle hand. "I want you to learn this bit of poetry by heart, and to say it sometimes to yourself in future years. And—and—should mamma have gone away then, it will be pleasant to you to remember that the angel's song came to cheer her—as I know it will come—when she was setting out on her journey. Oh! very pleasant! And the same song and the same angel will cheer your departure, my darling child, when the appointed hour for it shall come to you."

"Shall we *see* the angel?"

"Well—yes—with the eye of faith. And it is said that some good people have really seen him! have seen the radiant messenger who

has come to take them to the eternal shores. You will learn it, Charley, won't you—and never forget it?"

"I'll learn it all, every verse; and I will never forget it, mamma."

"I am going to give you this book, also, Charley," she went on, bringing forward the other. "You ——"

"Why, that's your Bible, mamma!"

"Yes, dear, it is my Bible; but I should like it to be yours. And I hope it will be as good a friend to you as it is now to me. I shall still use it myself, Charley, for a little while. You will lend it me, won't you? and later, it will be all your own."

"Shall you buy another for yourself, then?"

She did not answer. Her face was turned to the window; her yearning eyes were fixed in thought upon the blue sky; her hot hands were holding mine. In a moment, to my consternation, she bent her face upon mine and burst into a flood of tears. What I should have said or done, I know not; but at that moment papa came swiftly out of his study, into the room. He was a rather tall man with a pale, grave face, very much older than his wife.

"Do you chance to remember, Lucy, where that catalogue of books was put to that came last week? I want ——"

Thus far had he spoken, when he saw the state of things; both of us crying together. He broke off in vexation.

"How can you be so silly, Lucy—so imprudent! I will not have it. You don't allow yourself a chance to get well—giving way to these low spirits! What is the matter?"

"It is nothing," she replied, with another of those long sighs. "I was talking a little to Charley, and a fit of crying came on. It has not harmed me, Eustace."

"Charley, boy, I saw some fresh sweet violets down in the dingle this morning. Go you and pick some for mamma," he said. "Never mind your hat: it is as warm as midsummer."

I was ready for the dingle, which was only across the field, and to pick violets at any time, and I ran out. Leah Williams was coming in at the garden gate.

"Now, Master Charles! Where are you off to? And without your hat!"

"I'm going to the dingle, to get some fresh violets for mamma. Papa said my hat did not matter."

"Oh," said Leah, glancing doubtfully at the window. I glanced too. He had sat down on the sofa by mamma then, and was talking to her earnestly, his head bent. She had her handkerchief up to her face. Leah attacked me again.

"You've been crying, you naughty boy! Your eyes are wet now. What was that for?"

I did not say what: though I had much ado to keep the tears from falling. "Leah," I whispered, "do you think mamma will get well?"

"Bless the child," she exclaimed, after a pause, during which she had looked again at the window and back at me. "Why, what's to hinder it?—with all this fine, beautiful warm weather! Don't you turn fanciful, Master Charley, there's a darling! And when you've picked the violets, you come to me; I'll find a slice of cake for you."

Leah had been with us about two years, as upper servant, attending upon mamma and me, and doing the sewing. She was between twenty and thirty then, a well-grown, upright, superior young woman, kind in the main, though with rather a hard face, and faithful as the day. The other servants called her Mrs. Williams, for she had been married and was a widow. Not tall, she yet looked so, she was so remarkably thin. Her grey eyes were deep set, her curls were black, and she had a high, fresh colour. Everyone, gentle and simple, wore curls at that time.

The violets were there in the dingle, sure enough; both blue and white. I picked a handful, ran in with them, and put them on mamma's lap. The Rector was sitting by her still, but he got up then.

"Oh, Charley, they are very sweet," she said with a smile; "very sweet and lovely. Thank you, my precious boy, my darling."

She kissed me a hundred times. She might have kissed me a hundred more, but papa drew me away.

"Do not tire yourself any more to-day, Lucy; it is not good for you. Charley, boy, you can take your fairy tales to show to Leah."

The day of the funeral will never fade from my memory; and yet I can only recall some of its incidents. What impressed me most was that papa did not stand at the grave in his surplice reading the service, as I had seen him do at other funerals. Another clergyman was in his place, and he stood by me in silence, holding my hand. And he told me, after we returned home, that mamma was not herself in the cold dark grave, but a happy angel in Heaven looking down upon me.

And so the time went on. Papa was more grave than of yore, and taught me my lessons daily. Leah indulged and scolded me alternately, often sang to me, for she had a clear voice, and when she was in a good humour, would let me read "Sintram" and the fairy tales to her.

The interest of mamma's money—which was now mine—brought in three hundred a year. She had enjoyed it all; I was to have (or rather, my father for me) just as much of it as the two trustees chose to allow, for it was strictly tied up in their hands. When I was four-and-twenty years of age—not before—the duties of the trustees would cease, and the whole sum, six thousand pounds, would come into my uncontrolled possession. One of the trustees was my mother's uncle, Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar; the other I did not know. Of course the

reader will understand that I do not explain these matters from my knowledge at that time; but from what I learnt when I was older.

Nearly a year had gone by, and it was spring weather again, fine and warm. I sat in my brown-holland dress in the dingle amidst the primroses and the violets, the buttercups and daisies. A lot of cowslips lay about me; I had been picking the flowers from the stalks to make into a ball. The sunlight flickered through the trees, still in their tender green, the sky was blue and cloudless. My straw hat, with broad black ribbons, had fallen off; my white socks and shoes were stretched out before me. Fashion is always in extremes. Then, it was the custom to dress a child simply up to an advanced age.

Why it should have been so, I know not; but while I sat, there came over me a sudden remembrance of the day when I had come to the dingle to pick those violets for mamma, and a rush of tears came on. Leah took good care of me, but she was not mamma. My father was good and grave and kind, but he did not give me the love that she had given. A mother's love would never be mine again, and I knew it; and in that moment was bitterly feeling it.

One end of the string was held between my teeth, the other end in my left hand, and my eyes were wet. I strung the cowslips upon it as well as I could. But it was not easy, and I made little progress.

"S'all I hold it for oo?"

Lifting my eyes in surprise—for I had thought the movement in the dingle was only Leah, coming to see after me—there stood the sweetest fairy of a child before me. The sleeves of her cotton frock and white pinafore were tied up with black ribbons; her face was delicately fair, her eyes were blue as the sky, and her light curls fell low on her pretty neck. My child heart went out to her with a bound, then and there.

"What oo trying for, ittle boy?"

"I was crying for mamma. She's gone away from me to Heaven."

"S'all I tiss oo?"

And she put her little arms round my neck, without waiting for permission, and gave me a dozen kisses.

"Now we make the ball, ittle boy. S'all oo dive it to me?"

"Yes, I will give it to you. What is your name?"

"Baby. What it oors?"

"Charles. Do you ——"

"You little toad of a monkey!—giving me this hunt! How came you to run away?"

The words were spoken by a tall, handsome boy, quite old, compared with me, who had come dashing through the dingle. He caught

up the child and began kissing her fondly. So the words were not meant to hurt her.

"It was oo ran away, Tom."

"But I ordered you to stop where I left you—and to sit still till I came back. If you run away by yourself in the wood, you'll meet a great bear some day and he'll eat you up. Mind that, Miss Blanche. The mamsie is in a fine way; thinks you're lost, you silly little thing."

"Dat 'towslip ball for me, Tom."

Master Tom condescended to turn his attention upon me and the ball. I guessed now who they were: a family named Heriot, who had recently come to live at the pretty white cottage on the other side the copse. Tom was looking at me with his fine dark eyes.

"You are the parson's son, I take it, youngster. I saw you in the parson's pew on Sunday with an old woman."

"She is not an old woman," I said, jealous for Leah.

"A young one, then. What's your name?"

"Charles Strange."

"He dot no mamma; he try for her," put in the child. "Oo come to my mamma, ittle boy; she love oo and tiss oo."

"When I have made your ball."

"Oh, bother the ball!" put in Tom. "We can't wait for that: the mamsie's in a rare way already. You can come home with us if you like, youngster, and make your ball after."

Leaving the string and the cowslips, I caught up my hat and we started, Tom carrying the little one. I was a timid, sensitive little fellow; but I took courage to ask him a question.

"Is your name Tom Heriot?"

"Well, yes, it *is* Tom Heriot—if it does you any good to know it. And this is Miss Blanche Heriot. And I wish you were a bit bigger and older; I'd make you my playfellow."

We were through the copse in a minute or two and in sight of the white cottage, over the field beyond it. Mrs. Heriot stood at the garden gate, looking out. She was a pretty little plump woman, with a soft voice, and wore a widow's cap. A servant in a check apron was with her—and she knew me. Mrs. Heriot scolded Blanche for running away from Tom while she caressed her, and turned to smile at me.

"It is little Master Strange," I heard the maid say to her. "He lost his mother a year ago."

"Oh, poor little fellow!" sighed Mrs. Heriot, as she held me before her and kissed me twice. "What a nice little lad it is!—what lovely eyes! My dear, you can come here whenever you like, to play with Tom and Blanche."

Some few years before, this lady had married Colonel Heriot, a widower with one little boy—Thomas. After that, Blanche was

born: so that she and Tom were, you see, only half-brother-and-sister. When Blanche was two years old—she was three now—Colonel Heriot died, and Mrs. Heriot had come into the country to economise. She was not at all well off; had indeed little beyond what was allowed to her with the two children: all their father's fortune had lapsed to them, and she had no control over it. Tom had more than Blanche, and was to be brought up for a soldier.

As we stood in a group outside the gate, papa came by. Seeing me, he naturally stopped, took off his hat to Mrs. Heriot, and spoke. That is how the acquaintanceship began, without formal introduction on either side. Taking the pretty little girl in his arms, he began talking to her: for he was very fond of children. Mrs. Heriot said something to him in a low, feeling tone about his wife's death.

"Yes," he sighed in answer, as he put down the child: "I shall never recover the grief of her loss. I live only in the hope of rejoining her THERE."

He glanced up at the blue sky: the pure, calm, peaceful canopy of Heaven.

CHAPTER II.

CHANGES.

"I SHALL never recover the grief of her loss. I live only in the hope of rejoining her THERE."

It has been said that the vows of lovers are ephemeral as characters written on the sand of the sea-shore. Surely are also the regrets of mourners given to the departed! For time has a habit of soothing the deepest sorrow; and the remembrance which is piercing our hearts so poignantly to-day in a short few months may have lost its sting.

My father was quite sincere when speaking the above words: meant and believed them to the very letter. Yet before the spring and summer flowers had given place to those of autumn, he had taken unto himself another wife: Mrs. Heriot.

The first intimation of what was in contemplation came to me obscurely from Leah. I had offended her one day; done something wrong, or not done something right; when she fell upon me with a storm of reproach, especially accusing me of ingratitude.

"After all my care of you, Master Charles—my anxiety and trouble to keep your clothes nice and make you good! What shall you do when I am gone away?"

"But you are not going away, Leah."

"I don't know that. We are to have changes here, it seems, and I'm not sure that they will suit me."

"What changes?" I asked.

She sat at the nursery window, which had the same aspect as the drawing-room below, darning my socks; I knelt on a chair, looking out. It was a rainy day, and the drops pattered thickly against the panes.

"Well, there's going to be—some company in the house," said Leah, after taking her own time to answer me. "A *lot* of 'em. And I think perhaps there'll be no room for me."

"Oh, yes there will. Who is it, Leah?"

"I shouldn't wonder but it's those people over yonder," pointing her long darning-needle in the direction of the dingle.

"There's nothing there but mosses and trees, Leah. No people."

"There *is* a little farther off," nodded Leah. "There's Mrs. Heriot and her two children."

"Oh, do you say they are coming here!—do you mean it?" I cried in ecstasy. "Are they coming for a long visit, Leah?—to have breakfast here, and dine and sleep? Oh, how glad I am!"

"Ah!" groaned Leah; "perhaps you may be glad, just at first; you are but a little shallow-sensed boy, Charley: but it may turn out for better, or it may turn out for worse."

To my intense astonishment, she dropped her work, burst into tears, and threw her hands up to her face. I felt very uncomfortable.

"What is it, Leah?"

"Well, it is that I'm a silly," she answered, looking up and drying her eyes. "I got thinking of the past, Master Charley, of your dear mamma, and all that. It *is* solitary for you here, and perhaps you'll be happier with some playfellows."

I went on staring at her.

"And look here, Master Charles, don't repeat what I've said; not to anybody, mind; or perhaps they won't come at all," concluded Leah, administering to me a slight shake by way of enforcing her command.

There came a day—and it was in that same week—when everything seemed to go wrong, so far as I was concerned. I had been at warfare with Leah in the morning; and was so inattentive (I suppose) at lessons in the afternoon that papa scolded me, and gave me an extra Latin exercise to do when they were over, and shut me up in the study until it was done. Then Leah refused jam for tea, which I wanted; saying that jam was meant for good boys, not for naughty ones. Altogether I was in anything but an enviable mood when I went out later into the garden. The most cruel item in the whole was that I could not see *I* had been to blame, but thought everyone else was. The sun had set behind the trees of the dingle in a great red ball of fire as I climbed into my favourite seat—the fork of the pear-tree. Papa had gone to attend a vestry meeting; the little bell of the church was tinkling out, giving notice of the meeting to the parish.

Presently the bell ceased; solitary silence ensued both to the eye and ear. The brightness of the atmosphere was giving place to the shades of approaching evening; the trees were putting on their melancholy. I have always thought—I always shall think—that nothing can be more depressing than the indescribable melancholy which trees in a solitary spot seem to put on after sunset. All people do not feel this; but to those who, like myself, see it, it brings a sensation of loneliness, nay, of *awe*, that is strangely painful.

"Ho-ho! So you are up there again, young Charley!"

The garden-gate had swung back to admit Tom Heriot. In hastening to get down from the tree—for he had a way of tormenting me when in it—I somehow lost my balance and fell on to the grass-plat. Tom shrieked out with laughter, and made off again.

The fall was nothing—though my ankle ached; but at these untoward moments a little smart causes a great pain. It seemed to me that I was smarting all over, inside and out, mentally and bodily; and I sat down on the bench near the bed of shrubs, and burst into tears.

Sweet shrubs were they. Lavender and rosemary, old-man and sweet-briar, marjoram and lemon-thyme, musk and verbena; and others no doubt. Mamma had had them all planted there. She would sit with me where I was now sitting alone, under the syringa trees, and revel in the perfume. In spring-time those sweet syringa blossoms would surround us; she loved their scent better than any other. Bitterly I cried, thinking of all this, and of her.

Again the gate opened, more gently this time, and Mrs. Heriot came in looking round. "Thomas," she called out—and then she saw me. "Charley, dear, has Tom been here? He ran away from me.—Why, my dear little boy, what is the matter?" For she had seen the tears falling.

They fell faster than ever at the question. She came up, sat down on the bench and drew my face lovingly to her. I thought then—I think still—that Mrs. Heriot was one of the kindest, gentlest women that ever breathed. I don't believe she ever, in her whole life, said a sharp word to anyone.

Not liking to tell of my naughtiness—which I still attributed to others—or of the ignominious fall from the pear-tree, I sobbed forth something about mamma.

"If she had not gone away and left me alone," I said, "I should never have been unhappy, or—or cried. People were not cross with me when she was here."

"My darling, I know how lonely it is for you. Would you like me to come here and be your mamma?" she caressingly whispered.

"You could not be that," I dissented. "Mamma's up there."

Mrs. Heriot glanced up at the evening sky. "Yes, Charley, she is up there, with God; and she looks down, I feel sure, at you,

and at what is being done for you. If I came home here I should try to take care of you as she would have done. And oh, my child, I should love you dearly."

"In her place?" I asked, feeling puzzled.

"In her place, Charley. *For her.*"

Tom burst in at the gate again. He began telling his step-mother of my fall as he danced a war-dance on the grass, and asked me how many of my legs and wings were broken.

They came to the Rectory: Mrs. Heriot—she was Mrs. Strange then—and Tom and Baby. After all, Leah did not leave. She grew reconciled to the new state of things in no time, and became as fond of the children as she was of me. As fond, at least, of Tom. I don't know that she ever cared heartily for Blanche: the little lady had a haughty face and sometimes a haughty way with her.

We were all as happy as the day was long. Mrs. Strange indulged us all. Tom was a dreadful pickle—it was what the servants called him; but they all adored him. He was a handsome, generous, reckless boy, two years older than myself in years, twice two in height and advancement. He teased Leah's life out of her; but the more he teased, the better she liked him. He teased Blanche, he teased me; though he would have gone through fire and water for either of us, ay, and laid down his life any moment to save ours. He was everlastingly in mischief indoors or out. He called papa "sir" to his face, "the parson" or "his Reverence" behind his back. There was no taming Tom Heriot.

For a short time papa took Tom's lessons with mine. But he found it would not answer. Tom's guardians wrote to beg of the Rector to continue to undertake him for a year or two, offering a handsome recompense in return. But my father wrote word back that the lad needed the discipline of school, and must have it. So to school Tom was sent. He came home in the holidays, reckless and random, generous and loving as ever, and we had fine times together, the three of us growing up like brothers and sister. Of course I was not related to them at all: and they were only half related to each other.

Rather singularly, Thomas Heriot's fortune was just as much as mine: six thousand pounds: and left in very much the same way. The interest, three hundred a year, was to maintain and educate him for the army; and he would come into the whole when he was twenty-one. Blanche had less: four thousand pounds only, and it was tied up in the same way as Tom's was until she should be twenty-one, or until she married.

And thus about a couple of years went on.

No household was ever less given to superstition than ours at White Littleham Rectory. It never as much as entered the mind of any of its inmates, from its master downwards. And perhaps it

was this complete indifference to and disbelief in the supernatural that caused the matter to be openly spoken of by the Rector. I have since thought so.

It was Christmas-tide, and Christmas weather. Frost and snow covered the ground. Icicles on the branches glittered in the sunshine like diamonds.

"It is the jolliest day!" exclaimed Tom, dashing into the breakfast-room from an early morning run half over the parish. "People are slipping about like mad, and the ice is inches thick on the ponds. Old Joe Styles went right down on his back."

"I hope he was not hurt, Tom," remarked papa, coming down from his chamber into the room in time to hear the last sentence. "Good morning, my boys."

"Oh, it was only a Christmas gambol, sir," said Tom carelessly.

We sat down to breakfast. Leah came in to see to me and Tom. The Rector might be—and was—efficient in his parish and pulpit, but a more hopelessly incapable man in a domestic point of view, the world never saw. Tom and I should have come badly off had we relied upon him to help us, and we might have gobbled up every earthly thing on the table without his saying yea or nay. Leah, knowing this, stood to pour out the coffee. Mrs. Strange had gone away to London on Wednesday (the day after Christmas day) to see an old aunt who was ill, and had taken Blanche with her. This was Friday, and they were expected home again on the morrow.

Presently Tom, who was observant in his way, remarked that papa was taking nothing. His coffee stood before him untouched; some bacon lay neglected on his plate.

"Shall I cut you some thin bread and butter, sir?" asked Leah.

"Presently," said he, and went on doing nothing as before.

"What are you thinking of, papa?"

"Well, Charley, I—I was thinking of my dream," he answered. "I suppose it *was* a dream," he went on, as if to himself. "But it was a curious one."

"Oh, please tell it us!" I cried. "I dreamt on Christmas night that I had a splendid plum cake, and was cutting it up into slices."

"Well—it was towards morning," he said, still speaking in a dreamy sort of way, his eyes looking straight out before him as if he were recalling it, yet evidently seeing nothing. "I awoke suddenly with the sound of a voice in my ear. It was your mamma's voice, Charley; your own mother's; and she seemed to be standing at my bed-side. 'I am coming for you,' she said to me—or seemed to say. I was wide awake in a moment, and knew her voice perfectly. Curious, was it not, Leah?"

Leah, cutting bread and butter for Tom, had halted, loaf in one hand, knife in the other.

"Yes, sir," she answered, gazing at the Rector. "Did you *see* anything, sir?"

"No; not exactly," he returned. "I was conscious that whoever spoke to me, stood close to my bed-side; and I was also conscious that the figure retreated across the room towards the window. I cannot say that I absolutely saw the movement; it was more like some unseen presence in the room. It was very odd. Somehow I can't get it out of my head. ——Why, here's Mr. Penthorn!" he broke off to say.

Mr. Penthorn had opened the gate, and was walking briskly up the path. He was our doctor; a grey-haired man, active and lively, and very friendly with us all. He had looked in, in passing back to the village, to tell the Rector that a parishioner, to whom he had been called up in the night, was in danger.

"I'll go and see her," said papa. "You'd be none the worse for a cup of coffee, Penthorn. It is sharp weather."

"Well, perhaps I shouldn't," said he, sitting down by me, while Tom went off to the kitchen for a cup and saucer. "Sharp enough —but seasonable. Is anything amiss with you, Leah? Indigestion again?"

This caused us to look at Leah. She was whiter than the table cloth.

"No, sir; I'm all right," said Leah in answer, as she took the cup from Tom's hand and began to fill it with coffee and hot milk. "Something that the master has been telling us scared me a bit at the moment, that's all."

"And what was that?" asked the Doctor, lightly.

So the story had to be gone over again. Papa repeated it, rather more elaborately. Mr. Penthorn was sceptical; said it was a dream.

"I have just called it a dream," assented my father. "But, in one sense, it was certainly not a dream. I had not been dreaming at all, to my knowledge; have not the least recollection of doing so. I woke up fully in a moment, with the voice ringing in my ears."

"The voice must have been pure fancy," declared Mr. Penthorn.

"That it certainly was not," said the Rector. "I never heard a voice more plainly in my life; every tone, every word was distinct and clear. No, Penthorn, that someone spoke to me is certain; the puzzle is—who was it?"

"Someone must have got into your room, then," said the Doctor, throwing his eyes suspiciously across the table at Tom.

Leah turned sharply round to face Tom. "Master Tom, if you played this trick, say so," she cried, her voice trembling.

"I! that's good!" retorted Tom, as earnestly as he could speak. "I never got out of bed from the time I got into it. Wasn't likely to. I never woke up at all."

"It was not Tom," interposed papa. "How could Tom assume my

late wife's voice? It *was* her voice, Penthorn. I had never heard it since she left us; and it has brought back all its familiar tones to my memory."

The Doctor helped himself to some bread and butter, and gave his head a shake.

"Besides," resumed the Rector, "no one else ever addressed me as she did—'Eustace.' I have not been called Eustace since my mother died, many years ago, except by her. My present wife has never called me by it."

That was true. Mrs. Strange had a pet name for him, and it was "Hubby."

"'I am coming for you, Eustace,' said the voice. It was her voice; her way of speaking. I can't account for it at all, Penthorn. I can't get it out of my head, though it sounds altogether so ridiculous."

"Well, I give it up," said Mr. Penthorn, finishing his coffee. "If you *were* awake, Strange, someone must have been essaying a little sleight-of-hand upon you. Good-morning, all of you; I must be off to my patients. Tom Heriot, don't you get trying the ponds yet, or maybe I shall have you on my hands as well as other people."

We gave it up, also: and nothing more was said or thought of it, as far as I know. We were not, I repeat, a superstitious family. Papa went about his duties as usual and Leah went about hers. The next day, Saturday, Mrs. Strange and Blanche returned home; and the cold grew sharper and the frozen ponds were lovely.

On Monday afternoon, the last day of the year, the Rector mounted old Dobbin, to ride to the next parish. He had to take a funeral for the incumbent, who was in bed with gout.

"Have his shoes been roughed?" asked Tom, standing at the gate with me to watch the start.

"Yes; and well-roughed too, Master Tom," spoke up James, who had lived with us longer than I could remember, as gardener, groom, and general man-of-all-work. "'Tisn't weather, sir, to send him out without being rough-shod."

"You two boys had better get to your Latin for an hour, and prepare it for me for to-morrow; and afterwards you may go to the ponds," said my father, as he rode away. "Good-bye, lads. Take care of yourself, Charley."

"Bother Latin!" said Tom. "I'm going off now. Will you come, youngster?"

"Not till I've done my Latin."

"You senseless young donkey! Stay, though; I must tell the mamsie something."

He made for the dining-room, where Mrs. Strange sat with Blanche. "Look here, mamsie," said he; "let us have a bit of a party to-night."

"A party, Tom!" she returned.

"Just the young Penthorns and the Clints."

"Oh, do, mamma!" I cried, for I was uncommonly fond of parties. And "Do, mamma!" struck in little Blanche.

My new mother rarely denied us anything; but she hesitated now.

"I think not to-night, dears. You know we are going to have the school-treat to-morrow evening, and the servants are busy with the cakes and things. They shall come on Wednesday instead, Tom."

Tom laughed. "They *must* come to-night, mamsie. They *are* coming. I have asked them."

"What—the young Penthorns?"

"*And* the young Clints," said Tom, clasping his step-mother, and kissing her. "They'll be here on the stroke of five. Mind you treat us to plenty of tarts and cakes, there's a good mamsie!"

Tom went off with his skates. I got to my books. After that, some friends came to call, and the afternoon seemed to pass in no time.

"It is hardly worth while your going to the ponds now, Master Charles," said Leah, meeting me in the passage, when I was at last at liberty.

In looking back I think that I must have had a very obedient nature; for I was ever willing to listen to orders or suggestions, however unpalatable they might be. Passing through the back door, the nearest way to the square pond, the one to which Tom had gone, I looked out. Twilight was already setting in. The evening star twinkled in a clear, frosty sky. The moon shone like a silver shield.

"Before you could get to the square pond, Master Charley, it would be dark," said Leah, as she stood beside me.

"So it would," I assented. "I think I'll not go, Leah."

"And I'm sure you don't need to tire yourself for to-night," went on Leah. "There'll be romping enough and to spare if those boys and girls come."

I went back to the parlour. Leah walked to the side gate, wondering (as she said afterwards) what had come of the milk-man, for he was generally much earlier. As she stood looking down the lane, she saw Tom stealing up.

"He has been in some mischief," decided Leah. "It's not like *him* to creep up in that timorous fashion. Good patience! Why, the lad must have had a fright; his face is white as death."

"Leah!" said the boy shrinking as he glanced over his shoulder. "Leah!"

"Well, what on earth is it?" asked Leah, feeling a little dread herself. "What have you been up to at that pond? You've not been in it yourself, I suppose!"

"Papa—the parson—is lying in the road by the triangle, all pale and still. He does not move."

Whenever Master Tom Heriot saw a chance of scaring the kitchen with a fable, he plunged into one. Leah peered at him doubtfully in the fading light.

"I think he is dead. I'm sure he is," continued Tom, bursting into tears.

This convinced Leah. She uttered a faint cry.

"We took that way back from the square pond; I, and Joe and Bertie Penthorn. They were going home to get ready to come here. Then we saw something lying near the triangle, close to that heap of flint stones. It was *him*, Leah. Oh! what is to be done? I can't tell mamma, or poor Charley."

James ran up, all scared, as Tom finished speaking. He had found Dobbin at the stable door, without sign or token of his master.

Even yet I cannot bear to think of that dreadful night. We *had* to be told, you see; and Leah lost no time over it. While Tom came home with the news, Joe Penthorn had run for his father, and Bertie called to some labourers who were passing on the other side the triangle.

He was brought home on a litter, the men carrying it, Mr. Penthorn walking by its side. He was not dead, but he was quite unconscious. They put a mattress on the study table, and laid him on it.

He had been riding home from the funeral. Whether Dobbin, usually so sure-footed and steady, had plunged his foot into a rut, just glazed over by the ice, and so had stumbled; or whether something had startled him and caused him to swerve, we never knew. The Rector had been thrown violently, his head striking stones.

Mr. Penthorn did not leave the study. Two other surgeons, fetched in haste from the neighbouring town, joined him. They could do nothing for papa; *nothing*. He never recovered consciousness, and died during the night—about a quarter before three o'clock.

"I knew he would go just at this time, sir," whispered Leah to Mr. Penthorn as he was leaving the house, and she opened the front door for him. "I felt sure of it when the doctors said he would not see morning light. It was just at the same hour that he had his call, sir, three nights ago. As sure as that he is now lying there dead, as sure as that those stars are shining in the heavens above us, *that was his warning*."

"Nonsense, Leah!" reproved Mr. Penthorn, sharply.

Chances and changes. The world is full of them. A short time and White Littleham Rectory knew us no more. The Reverend Eustace Strange was sleeping his last sleep in the churchyard by his wife's side, and the Reverend John Ravensworth was the new Rector.

Tom Heriot went back to school. I was placed at one chosen

for me by my great uncle, Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar. Leah Williams left us to take service in another family, who were about to settle somewhere on the Continent. She could not speak for emotion when she said good-bye to me.

"It must be for years, Master Charles, and it may be for ever," she said, taking, I fancy, the words from one of the many favourite ditties, martial or love-lorn, she treated us to in the nursery. "No, we may never meet again in this life, Master Charles. All the same, I hope we shall."

And meet we did, though not for years and years. And it would no doubt have called forth indignation from Leah had I been able to foretell how, when that time of meeting came in after life, she would purposely withhold her identity from me and pass herself off as a stranger.

Mrs. Strange went to London, Blanche with her, to take up for the present her abode with her old aunt, who had invited her to do so. She was little, if any, better off in this second widowhood than she had been as the widow of Colonel Heriot. What papa had to leave he left to her; but it was not much. I had my own mother's money. And so we were all separated again; all divided: one here, another there, a third elsewhere. It is the way of the world. Change and chance! chance and change!

CHAPTER III.

MR. SERGEANT STILLINGFAR.

Gloucester Place, Portman Square. In one of its handsome houses—as they are considered to be by persons of moderate desires—dwelt its owner, Major Carlen. Major Carlen was a man of the world; a man of fashion. When the house had fallen to him some years before by the will of a relative, with a substantial sum of money to keep it up, he professed to despise the house to his brother officers and other acquaintances of the great world. He would have preferred a house in Belgrave Square, or in Grosvenor Place, or in Park Lane. Major Carlen was accustomed to speak largely; it was his way.

Since then, he had retired from the army, and was master of himself, his time and his amusements. Major Carlen was fond of clubs, fond of card-playing, fond of dinners; fond, indeed, of whatever constitutes fast life. His house in Gloucester Place was handsomely furnished, replete with comfort, and possessed every reasonable requisite for social happiness—even to a wife. And Major Carlen's wife was Jessy, once Mrs. Strange, once Mrs. Heriot.

It is quite a problem why some women cannot marry at all, try to do so as they may, whilst others become wives three and four times over, and without much seeking of their own. Mrs. Heriot (to give her her first name) was one of them. In very little more

than a year after her first husband died, she married her second; in not any more than a year after her second husband's death, she married her third. Major Carlen must have been captivated by her pretty face and purring manner; whilst she fell prone at the feet of the man of fashion, and perhaps a very little at the prospect of being mistress of the house in Gloucester Place. Anyway, the why and the wherefore lay between themselves. Mrs. Strange became Mrs. Carlen.

Reading over thus far, it has struck me that you may reasonably think the story is to consist chiefly of marrying and dying; for there has been an undue proportion of both events. Not so: as you will find as you go on. Our ancestors do marry and die, you know: and these first three chapters are only a prologue to the story which has to come.

Christmas has come round again. Not the Christmas following that which ended so disastrously for us at White Littleham Rectory, but one five years later. For the river of time flows on its course; and boys and girls grow insensibly towards men and women.

It had been a green Christmas this year. We were now some days past it. The air was mild, the skies were blue and genial. Newspapers told of violets and other flowers growing in nooks, sheltered and unsheltered. Mrs. Carlen, seated by a well-spread table, half dinner, half tea, in the dining-room at Gloucester Place, declared that the fire made the room too warm. I was reading. Blanche, a very fair and pretty girl now ten years old, sat on a stool on the hearthrug, her light curls tied back with blue ribbons, her hands lying idly on the lap of her short silk frock. We were all awaiting an arrival.

"Listen, Charles!" cried mamma—as I called her still. "I do think a cab is stopping."

I put down my book, and Blanche threw back her head and her blue ribbons in expectation. But the cab went on.

"It is just like Tom!" smiled Mrs. Carlen. "Nothing ever put him out as it does other people. He gives us one hour and means another. He *said* seven o'clock, so we may expect him at ten. I do wish he could have obtained leave for Christmas day!"

Major Carlen did not like children, boys especially: yet Tom Heriot and I had been allowed to spend our holidays at his house, summer and winter. Mrs. Carlen stood partly in the light of a mother to us both; and I expect our guardians paid substantially for the privilege. Tom was now nearly eighteen, and had had a commission given him in a crack regiment; partly, it was said, through the interest of Major Carlen. I was between fifteen and sixteen.

"I'm sure you children must be famishing," cried Mrs. Carlen. "It wants five minutes to eight. If Tom is not here as the clock strikes, we will begin tea."

The silvery bell had told its eight strokes and was dying away, when a cab dashing past the door suddenly pulled up. No mistake this time. We heard Tom's voice abusing the driver—or, as he called it, "pitching into him"—for not looking at the numbers.

What a fine, handsome young fellow he had grown! And how joyously he met us all; folding mother, brother and sister in one eager embrace. Tom Heriot was careless and thoughtless as it was possible for anyone to be, but he had a warm and affectionate heart. When trouble, and something worse, fell upon him later, and he became a town's talk, people called him bad-hearted amongst other reproaches; but they were mistaken.

"Why, Charley, how you have shot up!" he cried gaily. "You'll soon catch me."

I shook my head. "While I am growing, Tom, you will be growing also."

"What was it you said in your last letter to me?" he went on as we began tea. "That you were going to leave school?"

"Well, I fancy so, Tom. Uncle Stillingfar wrote to give notice at Michaelmas."

"Thinks you know enough, eh, lad?"

I could not say much about that. That I was unusually well educated for my years there could be no doubt about, especially in the classics and French. My father had laid a good foundation to begin with, and the school chosen for me was a first-rate one. The French resident master had taken a liking to me, and had me much with him. Once during the midsummer holidays he had taken me to stay with his people in France: to Abbeville, with its interesting old church and market place, its quaint costumes and uncomfortable inns. Altogether, I spoke and wrote French almost as well as he did.

"What are they going to make of you, Charley? Is it as old Stillingfar pleases?"

"I think so. I dare say they'll put me to the law."

"Unfortunate martyr! I'd rather command a pirate boat on the high seas than stew my brains over dry law books and musty parchments!"

"Tastes differ," struck in Miss Blanche. "And you are not going to sea at all, Tom."

"Tastes do differ," smiled Mrs. Carlen. "I should think it much nicer to harangue judges and law-courts in a silk gown and wig, Tom, than to put on a red coat and go out to be shot at."

"Hark at the mamsie!" cried Tom, laughing. "Charley, give me some more tongue. Where's the Major to-night?"

The Major was dining out. Tom and I were always best pleased when he did dine out. A pompous, boasting sort of man, I did not like him at all. As Tom put it, we would at any time rather have his room than his company.

The days I am writing of are not these days. Boys left school earlier then than they do now. I suppose education was not so comprehensive as it is now made : but it served us. It was quite a usual thing to place a lad out in the world at fourteen or fifteen, whether to a profession or a trade. Therefore little surprise was caused at home by notice having been given of my removal from school.

At breakfast, next morning, Tom began laying out plans for the day. "I'll take you to this thing, Charley, and I'll take you to that." Major Carlen sat in his usual place at the foot of the table, facing his wife. An imposing-looking man, tall, thin and angular, who must formerly have been handsome. He had a large nose with a curious twist in it ; white teeth, which he showed very much ; light grey eyes that stared at you, and hair and whiskers of so brilliant a black that a suspicious person might have said they were dyed.

'I thought of taking you boys out myself this afternoon," spoke the Major. "To see that horsemanship which is exhibiting. I hear it's very good. Would you like to go ?"

"Oh, and me too !" struck in Blanche. "Take me, papa."

"No," answered the Major, after reflection. "I don't consider it a fit place for little girls. Would you boys like to go ?" he asked.

We said we should like it ; said it in a sort of surprise, for it was almost the first time he had ever offered to take us anywhere.

"Charles cannot go," hastily interrupted Mrs. Carlen, who had at length opened a letter which had been lying beside her plate. "This is from Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar, Charley. He asks me to send you to his chambers this afternoon. You are to be there at three o'clock."

"Just like old Stillingfar !" cried Tom resentfully. Considering that he did not know much of Sergeant Stillingfar and had very little experience of his ways, the reproach was gratuitous.

Major Carlen laughed at it. "We must put off the horsemanship to another day," said he. "It will come to the same thing. I will take you out somewhere instead, Blanchie."

Taking an omnibus in Oxford Street, when lunch was over, I went down to Holborn, and thence to Lincoln's Inn. The reader may hardly believe that I had never been to my uncle's chambers before, though I had sometimes been to his house. He seemed to have held me at a distance. His rooms were on the first floor. On the outer door I read "Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar."

"Come in," cried out a voice, in answer to my knock. And I entered a narrow little room.

A pert-looking youth with a quantity of long, light, curly hair and an eye-glass, and not much older than myself, sat on a stool at a desk, beside an unoccupied chair. He eyed me from head to foot. I wore an Eton jacket and turn-down collar ; he wore a "tail" coat, a stand-up collar, and a stock.

"What do *you* want?" he demanded.

"I want Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar."

"Not in; not to be seen. You can come another day."

"But I am here by appointment."

The young gentleman caught up his eye-glass, fixed it, and turned it on me. "I don't think you are expected," said he, coolly.

Now, though he had been gifted with a stock of native impudence, and a very good stock it was at his time of life, I had been gifted with native modesty. I waited in silence, not knowing what to do. Two or three chairs stood about. He no doubt would have tried them all in succession, had it suited him to do so. I did not like to take one of them.

"Will my uncle be long, do you know?" I asked.

"Who *is* your uncle?"

"Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar."

He put up his glass again, which had dropped, and stared at me harder than before. At this juncture an inner door was pulled back, and a middle-aged man in a black coat and white neckcloth came through it.

"Are you Mr. Strange?" he enquired of me, quietly and courteously.

"Yes. My uncle, Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar, wrote to tell me to be here at three o'clock."

"I know. Will you step in here? The Sergeant is in Court, but he will not be long. As to you, young Mr. Lake, if you persist in exercising your impudent tongue upon all comers, I shall request the Sergeant to put a stop to your sitting here at all. How many times have you been told not to take upon yourself to answer callers, but to refer them to me when Michael is out?"

"About a hundred and fifty, I suppose, old Jones. Haven't counted them, though," retorted Mr. Lake.

"Impertinent young rascal!" ejaculated Mr. Jones, as he took me into the next room, and turned to a little desk that stood in a corner. He was the Sergeant's confidential clerk, and had been with him for years. Arthur Lake, beginning to read for the Bar, was allowed by the Sergeant and his clerk to sit in their chambers of a day, to pick up a little experience.

"Sit down by the fire, Mr. Strange," said the clerk. "It is a warm day, though, for the season. I expected the Sergeant in before this. He will not be long now."

Before I had well taken in the bearings of the room, which was the Sergeant's own, and larger and better than the other, he came in, wearing his silk gown and grey wig. He was a little man, growing elderly now, with a round, smooth, fair face, out of which twinkled kindly blue eyes. Mr. Jones got up from his desk at once to divest him of wig and gown, producing at the same time a miniature flaxen wig, which the Sergeant put upon his head.

"So you have come, Charles!" he said, shaking hands with me as he sat down in a large elbow-chair. Mr. Jones went out with his arm full of papers and shut the door upon us.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"You will be sixteen next May, I believe," he added. He had the mildest voice and manner imaginable; not at all what might be expected in a sergeant-at-law, who was supposed to take the Court by storm on occasion. "And I understand from your late master that in all your studies you are remarkably well advanced."

"Pretty well, I think, sir," I answered modestly.

"Ay. I am glad to hear you speak of it in a diffident, proper sort of way. Always be modest, lad; true merit ever is so. It tells, too, in the long run. Well, Charles, I think it time that you were placed out in life."

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any calling that you especially fancy? Any one profession you would prefer to embrace above another?"

"No, sir; I don't know that there is. I have always had an idea that it would be the law. I think I should like that."

"Just so," he answered, the faint pink on his smooth cheeks growing deeper with gratification. "It is what I have always intended you to enter—provided you had no insuperable objection to it. But I shall not make a barrister of you, Charles."

"No!" I exclaimed. "What then?"

"An attorney-at-law."

I was too much taken by surprise to answer at once. "Is that—a gentleman's calling, Uncle Charles?" I at length took courage to say.

"Ay, that it is, lad," he impressively rejoined. "It's true you've no chance of the woolsack, or of a judgeship, or even of becoming a pleader, as I am. If you had a ready-made fortune, Charles, you might eat your dinners, get called and risk it. But you have not; and I will not be the means of condemning you to pass the best years of your life in bitter, anxious poverty."

I only looked at him, without speaking. I fancy he must have seen disappointment in my face.

"Look here, Charles," he resumed, bending forward in his chair impressively: "I will tell you a little of my past experience. My people thought they were doing a great thing for me when they put me to the Bar. I thought the same. I was called in due course, and donned my stuff-gown and wig in glory—the glory cast by the glamour of hope. How long my mind maintained that glamour; how long it was before it began to give place to doubt; how many years it took to merge doubt into despair, I cannot tell you. I think something like fifteen or twenty."

"Fifteen or twenty years, Uncle Stillingfar!"

"Not less. I was steady, persevering, sufficiently clever. Yet

practice did not come to me. It is all a lottery. I had no fortune, lad; no one to help me. I was not clever at writing for the newspapers and magazines, as many of my fellows were. And for more years than I care to recall, I had a hard struggle for existence. I was engaged to be married. She was a sweet, patient girl, and we waited until we were both bordering upon middle age. Ay, Charles, I was forty years old before practice began to flow in upon me. The long lane had taken a turning at last. It flew in then with a vengeance—more work than I could possibly undertake."

"And—did you marry the young lady, Uncle Charles?" I asked in the pause he came to. I had never heard of his having a wife.

"No, child; she was dead. I think she died of waiting."

I drew a long breath, deeply interested.

"There are scores of young fellows starving upon hope now, as I starved then, Charles. The market is terribly overstocked. For ten barristers striving to rush into note in my days, you may count twenty or thirty in these. I will not have you swell the lists. My brother's grandson shall never, with my consent, waste his best years in fighting with poverty, waiting for luck that may never come to him."

"I suppose it is a lottery, as you say, sir."

"A lottery where blanks far outweigh prizes," he assented. "A lottery into which you shall not enter. No, Charles; you shall be spared that. As a lawyer, I can make your progress tolerably sure. You may be a rich man in time if you will, and an honourable one. I have sounded my old friend, Henry Brightman, and I think he is willing to take you."

"I am afraid I should not make a good pleader, sir," I acknowledged, falling in with his views. "I can't speak a bit. We had a debating-club at school, and in the middle of a speech I always lost myself."

He nodded, and rose. "You shall not try it, my boy. And that's all for to-day, Charles. All I wanted was to sound your views before making arrangements with Brightman."

"Has he a good practice, sir?"

"He has a very large and honourable practice, Charles. He is a good man and a *gentleman*," concluded the Sergeant, emphatically. "All being well, you may become his partner sometime."

"Am I not to go to Oxford, sir?" I asked, wistfully.

"If you particularly wish to do so and circumstances permit it, you may perhaps keep a few terms when you are out of your articles," he replied, with hesitation. "We shall see, Charles, when that time comes."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Mrs. Carlen, when I reached home. "Make you into a lawyer! That he never shall, Charles. I shall not allow it. I will go down and remonstrate with him."

Major Carlen said it was a shame; said it contemptuously. Tom

said it was a shame and a double-shame, and threw a host of hard words upon Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar. Blanche began to cry. She had been reading that day about a press-gang, and quite believed my fate would be worse than that of being pressed.

After breakfast, next morning, we hastened to Lincoln's Inn: I and Mrs. Carlen, for she kept her word. I should be a barrister or nothing, she protested. All very fine to say so! She had no power over me whatever. That lay with Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar and the other trustee, and he never interfered. If they chose to article me to a chimney-sweep instead of a lawyer no one could say them nay.

Mr. Jones and young Lake sat side by side at the desk in the first room when we arrived. Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar was in his own room. He received us very kindly, shaking hands with Mrs. Carlen, whom he had seen occasionally. Mrs. Carlen, sitting opposite to him, entered upon her protest, and was meekly listened to by the Sergeant.

"Better be a successful attorney, madam, than a briefless barrister," he observed, when she finished.

"All barristers are not briefless," said Mrs. Carlen.

"A great many of them are," he answered. "Some of them never make their mark at all; they live and die struggling men." And, leaning forward in his chair—as he had leaned towards me yesterday—he repeated a good deal that he had then said of his own history; his long-continued poverty, and his despairing struggles. Mrs. Carlen's heart melted.

"Yes, I know. It is very sad, dear Mr. Sergeant, and I am sure your experience is only that of many others," she sighed. "But, if I understand the matter rightly, the chief trouble of these young barristers is their poverty. Had they means to live, they could wait patiently and comfortably until success came to them."

"Of course," he assented. "It is the want of private means that makes the uphill path so hard."

"Charles has his three hundred a-year."

The faint pink in his cheeks, just the hue of a sea shell, turned to crimson. I was sitting beyond the table, and saw it. He glanced across at me.

"It will take more money to make Charles a lawyer and to ensure him a footing afterwards in a good house than it would to get him called to the Bar," he said with a smile.

"Yes—perhaps so. But that is not quite the argument, Mr. Sergeant," said my step-mother. "Any young man who has three hundred a-year may manage to live upon it."

"It is to be hoped so. I know I should have thought three hundred a-year a perfect gold mine."

"Then you see Charles need not starve while waiting for briefs to come in to him. Do you *not* see that, Mr. Sergeant?"

"I see it very clearly," he mildly said. "Had Charles his three hundred a-year to fall back upon, he might have gone to the Bar had he liked, and risked the future."

"But he has it," Mrs. Carlen rejoined, some surprise in her tone.

"No, madam, he has it not. Nor two hundred a-year, nor one hundred."

They silently looked at one another for a full minute. Mrs. Carlen evidently could not understand his meaning. I am sure I did not.

"Charles's money, I am sorry to say, is lost," he continued.

"Lost! Since when?"

"Since the bank panic that we had nearly two years ago."

Mrs. Carlen collapsed. "Oh, dear!" she breathed. "Did you —pray forgive the question, Mr. Sergeant—did you lose it? Or—or—the other trustee?"

He shook his head. "No, no. We neither lost it nor are we responsible for the loss. Charles's grandfather, my brother, invested the money, six thousand pounds, in bank debentures to bring in five per cent. He settled the money upon his daughter, Lucy, and upon her children after her, making myself and our old friend, George Wickham, trustees. In the panic of two years ago this bank *went*, its shares and its debentures became all but worthless."

"Is the money all gone? quite gone?" gasped Mrs. Carlen. "Will it never be recovered?"

"The debentures are Charles's still, but they are for the present almost worthless," he replied. "The bank went on again, and if it can recover itself and regain prosperity, Charles in the end may not greatly suffer. He may regain his money, or part of it. But it will not be yet awhile. The unused portion of the income had been sunk, year by year, in further debentures, in accordance with the directions of the will. All went."

"But—someone must have paid for Charles all this time—two whole years!" she reiterated, in her vexed surprise.

"Yes! it has been managed," he gently said.

"I think you must have paid for him yourself," spoke Mrs. Carlen with impulse. "I think it is you who are intending to pay the premium to Mr. Brightman, and to provide for his future expenses! You are a good man, Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar!"

His face broke into a smile: the rare sweet smile which so seldom crossed it. "I am only lending it to him. Charley will repay me when he is a rich man. But you see now, Mrs. Carlen, why a certainty will be better for him than an uncertainty."

We saw it all too clearly, and there was no more remonstrance to be made. Mrs. Carlen rose to leave, just as Mr. Jones came bustling into the room.

"Time is up, sir," he said to his master. "The Court will be waiting."

"Ah, so: is it? Good-morning, madam," he added, politely dismissing her. "I shall send for you here again in a day or two, Charles."

"Thank you for what you are doing for me, Uncle Charles," I whispered. "It is very kind of you."

He laid his hand upon my shoulder affectionately, keeping it there for a few seconds. And as we went out, the last glimpse I had was of his kind, gentle face, and Mr. Jones standing ready to assist him on with his wig and gown.

And we went back to Gloucester Place aware that my destiny in life was settled.

(*To be continued.*)

DREAMLAND.

I SING of a region, a realm of delight,
Where all things the traveller's wishes fulfil;
No chart ever needed to guide him aright,
Secure through its mazes he wanders at will.

Nor eastward nor westward a confine it meets,
Nor in the warm south or the cold northern zone;
Wherever the heart of humanity beats
There dreamland, dear dreamland, is sure to be known.

Here fancy the vigour of youth will restore;
Here feeble folk glory in deeds of emprise;
And here may the poorest find riches galore,
And the foolish awhile don the garb of the wise.

Oh, marvellous kingdom! What joy should we lose
If ever thy sceptre constrained to resign!
Let others more tangible sovereignty choose:
I envy no monarch while dreamland is mine.

SYDNEY GREY.

PROFESSOR SIR GEORGE ALEXANDER MACFARREN,

M.A.; Mus. Doc. Cantab.; Mus. Doc. Oxon.; and Mus. Doc. Dub.; Professor of Music in the University of Cambridge, and Principal of the Royal Academy of Music.

A Personal Reminiscence.

ANOTHER great musician is gone from among us, like a noble vessel sailing out into the far ocean of eternity, crowned with the glory of art, laden with blessings from those he taught and influenced. The light so long denied to those patient sightless eyes is radiant to them now; the long battle of life is over, and he has entered into the reward of his labours.

The memory of the past is a great power, and none who knew him can forget the liberality which animated him in the zeal with which he delighted in helping others to climb the heights he had himself surmounted and in recognising true worth wherever he found it.

At the memorial service in Westminster Abbey, the setting sun shone far above on those noble columns, and reminded us how the example of him we mourned was a light for us to follow through all trouble and difficulties; an example of cheerful endurance and of untiring energy, in the use of the noble powers he possessed.

The shadows of that autumn evening were only on the dark throng of those who prayed while his music "swelled the notes of praise" in that glorious Abbey where generation after generation of those who, like him we mourned, have loved and toiled and passed on to their rest.

I was a young student at the Royal Academy of Music long years ago, and then saw but little of him who was to be its future Principal. But, like his friend Sir Sterndale Bennett, he was even then rising fast in power and prestige.

Many years since I was called to the formation and government of one large music school after another, and the old feeling of loyalty to the great Academy, to which we all owed so much, made it natural for me to turn to its head for testimony as to the soundness of our work, and for our chief certificates of honours.

It would be difficult to say with how much kindness and genial encouragement the request was met, or how steadily, through all difficulties, the promise was kept. In all those years, the examinations for honours and scholarships in my music schools have been conducted with Professor Macfarren alone; as no one but the chief examiner and I, the head mistress, could be present.

As his friend and amanuensis, I could not but learn in this long intercourse of years, how high was his ideal, how keen his instant appreciation of genius, and his genial kindness and courtesy to those who, without genius, honestly did their best.

The Professor's earnest sympathy with those, also, who had been promoted to teach was very remarkable, when he spoke to them of the duties and responsibilities of their position. How every teacher must teach from his own heart, and give of his own life, or he would be no *teacher* in the highest sense of the word.

In his examinations for Harmony and Counterpoint, blind though he was, he knew each voice and turned to the speaker; pursued his elucidation of any point which had been incorrectly or hesitatingly answered; showing the connection of laws in the science, and throwing a new light on what was so dark before.

The marks which showed the comparative excellence of the competitors were put down at his dictation, after mutual consideration, as he was always anxious to hear all that bore on the inevitable differences between the young candidates. The technical excellences in time, execution, phrasing, were all noted; and the music was chosen so as to render absolutely necessary the study of the highest qualities of performance. I mean the kind of playing which Beethoven and Mozart did approve, and would have approved now: entailing the exactness which implies implicit obedience to the master's writing, and the perfect time which implies discipline and self-restraint. Every fault was noted and deducted from the total, so that the result might be as absolutely just as we could make it.

Meantime, the never failing kindness and charm with which he used to cheer those students whom we easily foresaw were least likely to win, by pointing out the respect their hard work had gained from him, and the good which such honourable competition brought them, was very delightful both to mistress and pupils.

In the drives together, to one of the schools mentioned, many subjects were discussed, in which the Professor took a keen interest.

Amongst them was one which bore on the welfare of those sisters in the profession who, like myself, entered the Royal Academy at a time when women were allowed to share its honours and privileges. It is unknown how many paid those heavy fees from straitened means, with the hope that after years of hard work, they might obtain ample power of helping the homes they loved: those homes which had endured difficulties and privations to give them an education possessing such hopes of reward.

The keenness of his feeling for those who suffered was always strong, and I remember a slight instance of this at one of the concerts at which he presided.

The lady sitting next him, in speaking of the young pupil on the platform, drew his attention to what *he* could not *see*. The child was singing, like her prototype the nightingale—the little brown bird who

cannot indulge in gay feathers or brilliant plumage—but he could not notice the neat, poor gown, or guess as a woman could the bitterness, to a young girl, of poverty showing through all effort, amongst a crowd of others so much more richly dressed. His warm-hearted grasp of the hand, and the words "Thank you, thank you for drawing my attention to it," came at once so brightly, so gratefully.

He could not see what his sympathy felt at once so keenly—he who had often told us of the struggles of his early life.

By the way, one remembrance of those old times tells curiously of the difference of past and present in North London.

He told us of a coming home one moonlight evening with a party of friends from Highgate. They came, a gay company, across the lonely fields which lay bright in the moonlight — where Somers Town now rejoices in bricks and smoke. The night was so lovely, and they were so unwilling to separate, that those who had violins took them out of their cases and struck up dance music, and those who had not, danced away through the night till early morning: an extempore ball-room, where there were none to spoil sport or report proceedings.

But the darkness soon settled on those eyes, and yet there was a long and arduous life's work to be done.

"For all may have, if they dare try, a glorious life or grave."

How keenly the Professor—as he liked to be called by his friends—felt and acted out those lines, can only be realised by those who know the difficulties under which he laboured; the trials he endured with an unrepining and brave cheerfulness which would have blinded most men to their existence. Yet there they were; the pressure of a great sorrow; the darkness of total blindness; and that to a man who found distraction or relief only in the intensity of unceasing work. How could this work—continued composition, continued examinations—be carried on by a man, like Samson Agonistes, totally blind?

I have written as his amanuensis of his method of examinations; of the system of graduated marks which settled the place of each competitor according to the perfection (or imperfection) which their work displayed. But many have expressed a wish to know how a musician, unable to see, could get complicated compositions, especially those for large orchestras, written down.

To explain this, it must be remembered that the works of many great composers are entirely written in the brain before putting pen to paper. The score of Don Giovanni (like others of Mozart's scores) is written without a flaw from beginning to end.

And see what this implies.

It needs, for this to be possible, that the whole of the composition, part-writing, orchestral writing, should be complete in the author's brain before coming to the light *at all.* In our own time, we know Mendelssohn is said to have had the greater part of "Christus" and

the whole of the "Lorelei," his only opera, already elaborated in his head when he died. It was unwritten, and so we have lost it for ever; but it *was there*, composed, perfected.

It must have been so also with the Professor's compositions. It became, therefore, simply a stupendous effort of memory, which could in imagination see the score of perhaps thirty or forty parts, page by page, and dictate it line by line, instrument after instrument, voice after voice, from the top to the bottom of that page: and then go on dictating the next page, also from top to bottom, till every page of the whole chorus, overture, or other portion of the composition had been started into life, and written. The condition only of this wonderful act of memory being that, once written, it was entirely forgotten, so that the brain page was perfectly clear for the next dictation. And the composition, the "child of his brain," as it were, became a perfect stranger to the author of its life: just as Mendelssohn has been known utterly to deny various slight compositions, till his own hand was proved against him.

The writer cannot close this little sketch of what she has known of a friend, who for so many years has been a rock of support and unfailing goodness to her, as to so many others, without some mention of an interesting gathering at which she was present not long since.

In February, 1883, the Professor's seventieth birthday was approaching, and the Secretary of the Royal Academy, talking over the coming event, said: "Couldn't something be done to make it a bright day for him, and mark our sense of what he is to us."

The one necessity was that he should be kept in perfect ignorance of this friendly conspiracy. And very difficult that was, seeing how many people, all over the country and beyond it, would feel wronged if they were not allowed to take part. The great fear was that somehow, in spite of all precautions, it would leak out, and a summary stop be put to all proceedings by the Professor himself, who certainly would have quashed the affair at once, had it come to his knowledge. I think even blindness here was something in the conspirators' favour.

At the very last, only under the plea that two or three old friends who could not meet anywhere else would be at the Academy to congratulate him on his birthday, did he allow himself to set aside some other duty. Those who were there will never forget that crowded, excited assemblage of noted musicians: the mutual sympathy, the anxiety for him as to how he would bear the shock of meeting suddenly such an assemblage, gathered to do him honour.

At last, led in by his brother, Walter Macfarren, and others, to a ring of welcome which would have warmed the dead to life, slowly, hesitatingly came the Professor; staggered by the tremendous cheering which told the keen ears what the blind eyes could not see; what the enthusiastic mass of friends assembled to meet him felt.

But when Sir Julius Benedict read aloud the roll of names, and the letter which accompanied, and presented the gift—the large sum placed at his disposal as a token of the gratitude of the many and the love of all—we did fear it would have been more than he could bear. It was the remembrance of a lifetime to hear the speech he made, after almost breaking down: especially when he alluded to her who was so far away, and would but for ill health have been there to share his happiness.

The writer and her sister were alone with him in his study the day after, when the sightless eyes shed tears at the loved remembrance of so much affection. He laid his hands on the heads of his two friends to bless them, and the remembrance of that blessing must remain with those who loved him so well and revered him so truly: as it will be with all those who have had the privilege of his noble influence in the service of the art he loved and served so passionately. It will remind them that in the hands of the truly great, obstacles can rouse the energies, sorrow may be transfigured into a divine cheerfulness, and a brave spirit will override both sorrow and difficulty, as the snow mountain rises from the shadowed valley into the glories of the setting sun:

> "Though at its feet the rolling clouds be spread,
> Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

There was much sunshine that rested on our beloved friend, and brightened his days with sympathy and reverence. That of his crowd of pupils, whether in his great university lectures, or at the Royal Academy halls. That of the appreciation of fellow workers in his beloved art; of the joy of composition, the glory of living in works of his own creation. Many blessings were crowded on that revered head. The band of brothers who had fought through obstacles together were true to each other to the last, and the strength of that home union is one which all who know it will understand—its quiet force and peace.

His great wish, never to know the weakness and infirmities of age, was granted by that merciful God who had given him the powers he had used so faithfully; and he died in harness, at the hour when his Secretary was appointed to receive his usual dictation.

Our last remembrance of him was when, a few days before his death, he and his young guide passed us on our road home: he on his way to his brother's for the regular weekly meeting, never omitted, and held up to the very evening before he died. With his bright love of a joke, we heard his cheerful voice and laugh as they passed say: "Good-bye; *we young* people go first."

He has gone first, in many ways, but will never be forgotten by those who knew and loved him.

C. A. Macirone.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

THE FIVE MR. FYTTONS.

By S. E. Waller.

HERE we all are sitting in the little dining-room—father, mother, Willie Beamish, and I. Willie and I wondering what the dickens we'll do next. It is evening, or rather night. It has rained for days like a waterspout, and Willie and I have done no sketching as yet.

He's down here with me on a visit. Oh! you've got to know him, that jovial creature, though he's always in debt, and always fearing its consequences.

He'll sing you the bonniest songs in the world and then show you his etchings, which are at strange variance with himself.

He'll pull from a heap of studies a "Churchyard Scene," black and bare; a skeleton yew-tree, a broken-down cottage, and a ruined church. And as with a light in his eye he tells you the title, the "Home of the Sexton," he takes up another, the "Suicide's Grave." He always keeps his favourite till the last. It is a river scene—midnight. There is ice on the river. There is snow on the ice. The sky is dark and ghastly. The dark of the sky is repeated in the foreground by a single black hole in the white snow. Beneath is written, evidently in the most fervid ecstasy, "Where they found the body."

"Well," says Willie, at last: "if the weather still keeps bad, I shall wire to town for old Slanter, the model, and get on with my Falstaff picture."

"Who's old Slanter?" says my father.

"Oh, the best model in London for a bit of low comedy. Splendid. I've had him sit for a 'Father Confessor' too; but every now and then he looked so sly, I fear the odour of sanctity was sadly wanting in my picture. The worst of the old fellow is he is rather fond of whisky, and is not always to be depended on."

"Then don't have him here," says my mother, hastily.

"Oh! he'll be all right. I'll get him a room in the village; and if he doesn't keep sober I won't pay him."

It turned out fine the next day, and though our sketching ground was a long way off—some six miles—we trudged there every morning and back at night, and worked hard. So hard, that we got our studies of the old mere done long before we had anticipated. Willie Beamish thought it as well to write for Slanter.

Now I must tell you that this mere was in a deep wood, and a pretty awful-looking place it was. The water was perfectly smooth and black, and in places great green patches of stagnant weeds were rotting on the surface. At the northern end were a ruined boat-house and a sluice-gate, surrounded by dead bullrushes, which hung their poor brown heads downwards to the water, all broken-necked and splintered. The ground rose at the back of the boat-house, from which ran what many years ago had been a path, but which was now covered with tangle up to "Grey Shadows," whose battered chimneys stood, as they had stood for centuries, motionless amidst the swaying trees. When, as we often did, we forced our way through the tangle and looked up at the house, the sight was sad and pathetic in the extreme. And when those white doves that dwelt in the roof came and looked down upon us from the ruined casements, we often wondered if they were the spirits of those who once, perchance, had lived there—happily or unhappily, ah, who shall say?

The place was in some degree looked after by an old man called Sheppard. He and his wife lived in two of the lower rooms that were still fairly water-tight; and many a queer story the old man told us. His chronology was curious. He had no notion of Anno Domini, but dated all his facts by the collapse of those different portions of the building that had fallen about his head during the seventy-two years of his occupancy.

"Oh, my darter 'Liza—her was borned same week as the picter gallery roof came down, many a year ago. 'Er 'ave a growed up fam'ly now. Eh? 'ow long ev I been yer?—why a wur a bhoy when a comed first along o' my oncle, and it wur wen 'e took I to see Jack Dunsdon hung as we come back in the evening, and vound that staircase down. It were a litter too, I do assure you. You gents finds it pleasant here in Zummer—but just come in the winter when they floods is out. You'd come reck'ning to see a landscape, and you'd find a hocean."

The picture gallery was a splendid room, with a rich oak parqueted floor, fairly intact. But, as the old man said, most of the elaborate plaster ceiling had fallen away. The walls still bore the marks made by the pictures that once had hung there. Ah! where were those pictures now? At the end of the room, in a niche between the two windows, was a clock. Its crooked and warped old hands marked half-past four. It looked down upon the old room's desolation with the same equanimity that it had looked down upon its pride. It had tasted ruin with its master, and the works which for so many years had kept it going had fallen through the bottom of the case, and lay in rusty fragments on the floor.

"Who did this place belong to?" I said to Sheppard one day.

"Belong to? Why, wur do 'ee come from? Belong to, ir deed! Why, to the Five Mr. Fyttons, to be sure."

Of course we gave the old man no rest until, after much persuasion, he told us the story of

The Five Mr. Fyttons.

But I am not going to bore you with Sheppard's vernacular, so start off in my own way.

It seems that the Hon. Richard Fytton had died about a hundred and fifty years back. He died suddenly, leaving three sons, and three months after his death, his wife died in giving birth to a fourth son.

Now the legend goes that in early life the Hon. Richard had not been strictly immaculate—in fact, that he had been quite the reverse. One young lady, with whom he had contracted a sort of Fleet marriage, had vowed, the day he deserted her (which by the way he did immediately), to haunt him and his kindred for ever, or until the last of his line was extinct. He laughed and left her, to marry a wealthy heiress—the owner of "Grey Shadows."

All went well for many years. As I have already told you they had four sons, when a hunting accident to the Hon. Richard deprived the sons of their father's protection. That night his body was brought home on a shutter, and laid solemnly on the state bed. At midnight a finger tapped upon the casement, a face was pressed upon the glass, and a voice said: "*The First Mr. Fytton.*"

Years went on. Three of the boys grew into stalwart men, but the last born always suffered at intervals from a weakness of the heart. All went well with the boys, excepting that the younger one never played with his brothers. He was quiet and taciturn. They called him "Baby Charles."

Over the other side of the mere, hidden behind the shoulder of the hill, stood "Velvet Hall." Of the people who had owned it Sheppard knew little. But he knew this: that their second daughter, Evelyn O'Brien, was just the loveliest thing that ever walked the earth. What so natural as that Richard Fytton, the elder son, should love her, or that she should laugh at him. That he in desperation should ride home after his second refusal, across country, and in attempting a short cut by an arm of the mere, should be drowned.

His body, like his father's, was laid upon the state bed, and at midnight a finger tapped upon the casement, a face was pressed upon the glass, and a voice said: "*The Second Mr. Fytton.*"

The next boy entered the Army. He enjoyed a distinguished career and returned home on leave for four years, owing to wounds contracted while on service under Clive in India.

He, too, saw Evelyn O'Brien, and like his brother loved her. She liked him, but whether her nature was capable of a passionate attachment is most uncertain. She played with him, and cajoled

him as she had done with his brother Richard: and as she was beginning to do with his cousin James.

This could not go on long unperceived. A fearful quarrel took place between the cousins. In a moment of frantic anger swords were drawn, and John Fytton fell by the hand of his own kinsman.

His body, like his father's, was laid upon the state bed, and at midnight a finger tapped upon the casement, a face was pressed upon the glass, and a voice said: "*The Third Mr. Fytton.*"

The end of the others is more mysterious. Hal, who at the death of his two elder brothers succeeded to the property, fell, as his brothers had fallen, head over ears in love with Evelyn O'Brien, though she was two years his senior. He simply lived at Velvet Hall; that is, whenever Evelyn did not drive him home—which she did in a fit of temper pretty often.

Her father and mother so bowed to her will that her will was simply law with them. She ordered the world, and the world obeyed. Suitors she had many, and the scandal of the deaths of two brothers who had died for love of her only served to enhance her fascination.

She was gay and happy always, as long as the sun was shining; but bitterly depressed if anything that annoyed her crossed her path. Capable of bestowing the utmost of the affection that lay at her command on the man or woman who gave her everything she wished for; and as capable of withdrawing it, and supplying its place with the utmost indifference, if the amount of bodily comfort to which she had been accustomed fell short in the smallest degree.

She liked Hal. He had money, a fine estate, a handsome person and a sweet, gentlemanly manner—but she wanted more. She was one of those women who only love those they fear. And fear poor Hal she did not.

Amongst her other wooers was one who, though he seldom was in her company, seemed, when he did come to Velvet Hall, to exercise a certain amount of influence over this wilful beauty. Though he was but a delicate man, in appearance almost effeminate, there was something strangely masterful about him. Talented and fascinating, he was yet extremely trying, owing to his variable and irritating temper. Never violent, he would at times say, with his slow smile that meant so much, the bitterest things to Evelyn in the presence of others, which, strange to say, she received with comparative equanimity. Had any other creature in the universe attempted to say one tithe of that he gave utterance to, the regret would have lasted to his dying day. His name was Lawrence Tanfield.

Between him and Henry Fytton a strong intimacy existed, for things had not yet come to that pass when jealousy was likely to step in. Henry Fytton, in his open, boyish way, saw in his friend no rival, because he *was* his friend. What Tanfield thought, we know not; but I suspect, such was his belief in himself, and his quiet way of

always carrying his point, that he felt if the day ever came when he decided that he liked Evelyn well enough to marry her, she would be his.

One evening in late autumn, Hal Fytton asked her to be his wife. She had laughed at him and smiled on him so often that he thought his chance secure. But she only shook her pretty head and said: "It could never be."

Three days later Lawrence Tanfield rode over to Velvet Hall. He was in his own strange humour—caustic and perverse; but the news, which had somehow or other leaked out, that Evelyn had refused his quondam friend, had brought his own affections to a crisis.

That he loved her as some men would have loved, I doubt. That he would have stood calmly by and seen his rival take the prize out of his hand, I doubt still more. But that any should suppose that he could not have the very thing he asked for was an impossibility with Lawrence Tanfield.

On arriving he gave his horse to a groom, refusing to go into the house, but asked where he could find Miss O'Brien.

"She's somewhere about, sir, in the park. I see her in the avenue some half-hour back," said the servant.

"Thank you," said Lawrence, as he sauntered out under the two rows of lime trees that stretched in unbroken array, stiff and stately, to the centre gates of the park.

On the left of the avenue stood a little ring of firs and copper beeches, surrounded by a larch fence. It was called "the Folly," though why I do not know.

Lawrence walked up the avenue and back again; then turned sharp across the grass to the Folly. His motive by this time had nearly faded from his mind, but in getting over the fence he remembered what he had come for. A strange, strange nature was his. The present ever in his mind, with a perfectly irresistible force; absent, dear though it might be, a shadowy vision which might wait his leisure.

After getting over the rail, he pushed his way beneath the lower boughs of the fir-trees, grey, slight and brittle, until he came to an open space amidst those hoary tree-trunks whose feathery tops towered up in a net-work of tracery above his head.

The autumn wind swept round and round the little wood, and collected in the centre a huge heap of red and yellow beech leaves. The mound was crushed down here and there as by footsteps, and further on, where the leaves were dry and seemed to lie thickest, was the impression of a woman's form. Not only that: still further on lay a book, evidently just cast down, and beside it a woman's glove.

Lawrence considered for one moment; his face lightened; he took up the lady's glove and threw down his own.

"Stay dinner, Tanfield," said old Mr. O'Brien when he got back

to the house. "All very glad to see you. Evelyn will be in presently. Go and talk to Norah."

The young man did as he was bid, and while he and the elder sister chatted at the drawing-room window, Evelyn O'Brien came across the grass in full view of them.

Tall, upright as a dart, she looked just what she was—a beauty. An amused smile was on her lips as she neared the house, when suddenly she caught sight of Tanfield's eyes at the window. Down dropped her thick, black, tangled eyelashes, and up went "the red flag at the fore:" that pretty simile a sailor uses for his sweetheart's blush.

When dinner was over, Tanfield made an early excuse to leave the dining-room. Norah, the eldest, he found at the piano; Evelyn sitting in a low chair just outside the open window.

"You seem fond of reading, Miss O'Brien," said he.

"Very," she answered.

"And in strange places."

"Indeed! And so you've found that out. And it was you I suppose who had the impudence to take my glove? Please give it back to me at once."

"May I not keep it?" said Lawrence very softly.

"As you please. I have lost the fellow to it, so it is of no consequence. By the way, I hope you don't want yours back again?"

"Mine?"

"The one you left; because Scout buried it with some old bones he found in the Folly. He's not fond of rubbish, and he likes to get it out of sight I suppose."

"While he was about it, I daresay you think he might just as well have buried me?"

"I did not say so," she replied.

"Evelyn," said the young man, suddenly, "life is short at the best. I am not a man, as you know, to hesitate to ask a question, though it may involve the whole life's happiness of two people and the deep interests of many more. I want you to tell me something, dear."

He had taken her hand in his, and she, after half withdrawing it, had let it remain.

"I want you to tell me if you love me. You know, you must know, how dearly I love you with my whole, whole heart," and as he said it he believed it most implicitly. "If you refuse me, I shall have nothing left in this world to live for. And, Evelyn, remember it is no light thing I ask of you. I mean love in its entirety. No mere liking or toleration, but a complete giving of one to the other. You have shown 'the red flag' once to-day already; were it not so dark, I fancy I should see it now. There it must always be for me, and for me only. Do you understand? It must never come down, and I would sooner put up with an absolute refusal than see it flying half-mast high."

Evelyn turned. She rose from her chair and walked a few steps down the terrace into the deeper shadow. Tanfield followed.

"Lawrence," she said, "you have asked me a simple question and I will give you a simple answer. Be true and gentle with me, and I will love you all my life. And I would rather see us both dead this night than that our pennon should ever droop to half-mast high."

With a vow to keep and cherish her for ever, Tanfield caught her in his arms and passionately kissed her lips.

She gently, oh so gently, returned his caress; but hers was given with all the concentration of her trusting womanhood, and his—ah! his, I fear, was but half-mast high.

For a time all went merry as a marriage bell. The old people were delighted (for Tanfield was a good match), and every prospect of happiness seemed spread before the young couple. But two such fiery natures could hardly be in daily intimacy but that tiffs and quarrels of a more or less serious character were bound to spring up between them.

Especially was this true in the matter of riding, of which the girl was very fond. Tanfield encouraged her in the matter, with one reservation. There was a mare in the stable called "Brenda," thoroughbred, vicious, and intractable. To ride this mare was Evelyn O'Brien's great delight. She was a splendid horsewoman, and the mare's antics amused and exhilarated her. Tanfield saw that, fortunate as she had been hitherto, a serious accident was inevitable sooner or later, and in unmistakable terms he forbade her to mount the animal.

"Plenty of time for obedience, Lawrence. I have not been through church doors yet," she said.

"I am not demanding obedience, but only wish to ensure your safety. You cannot ride that mare without great risk."

"I cannot ride, then? Thank you for nothing, my polite fiancé."

"I say neither you nor any other living creature can ride her with safety. I say, moreover, that as long as I have any hold on you, you shall *not* mount her."

"Any hold on me? And suppose I say you have none?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "That rests with you," he replied.

"With me?"

"Yes, with you."

"Then you have none. I hate interference."

"I will take care never to interfere again. Good morning, Miss O'Brien." He raised his hat, turned, and left her.

For weeks after this episode she kept her thoughts proudly to herself, thinking how he would return penitent, or write a heart-

broken apology, and planning out how she would act in either case. But as day after day went by, and neither he nor his letter put in an appearance, the spoilt girl's spirit began to waver, and she frequently gave way to tears.

And where was Lawrence Tanfield?

He walked over to Burnham, ordered a conveyance, and getting his luggage packed, went home to Hampshire. He stayed there for a little time with his father, and, having explained that he was in need of change, went abroad, and, for a long time was not heard of. Some said he had entered a foreign service; others that he had joined a monastery in Spain.

Meanwhile Evelyn, saddened and depressed, still remained unmarried, though suitor after suitor came to try his luck.

I suppose it must have been about two years later, when honest, open-hearted Hal Fytton again proposed to her. To his intense surprise and delight, he was accepted.

"I cannot love you," said Evelyn; "but if you will be content with a weary woman's respect and honest liking, I'll do the best I can to make you happy."

Poor Hal! All the country round was not big enough to hold him. With what honest pride he spoke about his sweetheart—the sweetheart he had never dared to kiss. That reticence was not the way to win her; certainly not a woman of her nature—frozen and petrified as it had now become. But, poor fellow, he knew no better, and thought, with so many others, that timidity showed respect and devotion. Had you told him that something a little more reckless and devil-may-care, even though at times liable to give offence, would in the end outdistance any feeble wooing, he would not have believed it; or if he had, he would have been quite incapable of practising it. One cannot teach these things. Teach a sheep to all eternity, he will never learn to roar. So matters stood, and the engaged couple seemed on the one side fairly content, on the other deliriously happy.

At Christmas, old Mr. O'Brien determined to celebrate his daughter's engagement by a ball, to which all the people round about who were "anyone in particular" were invited.

It was a fancy dress ball, and masks were optional.

Hal led off the first dance with Evelyn. He engaged her for many more. The old ball-room was crowded. Over two hundred and fifty people, in every variety of dress, thronged the place. Wine, music, and beautiful faces all combined to make the hearts of hosts and guests as happy as they could be.

In the intervals of the dances, speculation was rife as to who this person was, who that—alluding to anyone specially well disguised. There was a knight in armour, a jester, a mountebank, and dozens more. But as Hal Fytton walked round the end of the room under

the musicians' gallery, with Evelyn on his arm, he passed a headsman with an axe thrown across his shoulder; his face was hidden by a mask, his eyes glittering from behind it. They fell on Evelyn for one second, but were instantly withdrawn. She stood still, staggered, and would have fallen but that Hal caught her.

"Good heavens," he said, "are you ill?"

"Yes, oh yes! For heaven's sake take me into the air."

Cold as it was, he led her on to the stone walk outside the ball-room windows.

"Bring me my hood," she said, "and my fur mantle."

He brought them immediately, and was about to offer her his arm.

"No, no," she said, shrinking back. "I have these attacks sometimes, and then I must be alone. Leave me, and come and look for me in half an hour."

He left her; little knowing that, though he was to see her once again, he had spoken to her for the last time.

In half an hour he came back. She was not there. He searched for her in the ball-room, but she was not among the dancers. He then turned back into the garden, walked down the terrace steps, over the soft snow where his footsteps were wholly inaudible, and drifted aimlessly towards the mere.

And how lovely the mere looked. What can be lovelier than moonlight on the snow? The huge fir-trees stood towering upwards, their great boughs weighed down with it, pointing like giant hands towards the ground. Beneath them was impenetrable darkness, and stretching over the pure snow their warm grotesque shadows, formed every weird and curious shape that might appeal to an excited brain. Here and there tall, slender, withered grasses—the last reminiscence of the summer that had gone—stood bowing to the wind, each one decked with such diamonds as no beauty in the adjacent ball-room could lay a claim to; each one glittering in translucent intensity in the silver moonlight, with its crown of icicles about its head.

Suddenly Fytton stopped, conscious of two figures in close embrace ten yards distant from him, by the shore. The girl's hands were resting on the man's shoulders, her face was lifted up to his—to his, the headsman—and as she lifted it, she sobbed out: "Oh, Lawrence, Lawrence, as if you did not know you are the only man I ever really cared for."

He kissed her, and whispered some loving words into her ear. Again she lifted her face, but as he bent down towards her he pushed back his mask.

Fytton gave a sudden start; a bough cracked beneath his feet. They turned, and as they turned the clouds that had veiled the moon passed quickly over. The bright ray fell upon their faces. The girl was Evelyn O'Brien and the man was Lawrence Tanfield.

No words were uttered. Half-a-dozen steps, and they grappled together. A knife flashed, something fell—something heavy, inert,

awful—that never spoke or moved again. And there was blood upon the snow ; the blood of Hal Fytton. His body, like his father's, was laid upon the state bed, and at midnight a finger tapped upon the casement, a face was pressed upon the glass, and a voice said : "*The Fourth Mr. Fytton.*"

Of all the brothers, there was now left but "Baby Charles." He was about eleven, and the executors under his brother's will suggested that his mother's first cousin, Mrs. Arnold, a widow, should occupy "The Grey Shadows," with the object of being a mother to the boy until such a time as he went to college or came of age.

Men, however, will one way and Fate another, and all the care and watchfulness bestowed on the delicate lad were powerless to help him against the deadly curse which hung over his family.

The one passion that possessed the boy was hawking, and day after day he would wander out alone, despite the anxiety of Mrs. Arnold, with his hawk upon his wrist. When in the cold weather the wild ducks came down upon the low swamps in thousands, and many hundreds of acres of land were under water, more or less, the country round Grey Shadows was quite a falconer's paradise.

Early one morning in December, when the floods were just covered with a thin coating of ice, Baby Charles with his hawk upon his wrist went off to the lower meadows in search of wild-fowl. It was late in the afternoon when the first anxiety began to be felt about him, on account of his prolonged absence. The country was scoured far and wide, but to no purpose. It is supposed that while wading in the floods he must unhappily have walked into a dyke, as it was not until the evening of the fourth day that Jack Badgington, the poacher, came in to say he had seen the poor lad's body floating amongst the bullrushes on Long Pool Lake, and the hawk was still sitting on his breast.

His body, like his father's, was laid upon the state bed, and at midnight a finger tapped upon the casement, a face was pressed against the glass, and a voice said : "*The Fifth Mr. Fytton.*"

"A good story, Mr. Sheppard," said Willie. "A sort of thing to dream of, after a heavy supper."

"Well, Willie," said I, "it's getting dark, and I think, as we have six miles to walk, we had better trudge."

Off we started, just as the sun was beginning to get low, and long quaint shadows fell across the green bridle-path, which, meandering round the hills, brought us out on the main road about two miles from home.

We had nearly got to what was called the deep cutting, a place where the road ran between two high banks bordered with fir trees, when we heard a muttered exclamation, followed by a grievous panting and puffing.

"Good heavens, what's that?" said I.

"An asphyxiated grampus, I should say," returned Willie.

"No, it's a man lying by the road-side. What in the world is he doing?"

We went on a little further, and nothing could I make of the mystery, when Willie burst into a roar of laughter.

"Don't you see?" he said. "It's Slanter, tipsy as an owl, and trying to light his pipe at a glow-worm."

So it was.

"Get up," said Beamish. "What the deuce are you doing there?"

"Trying to light my pipe, sir, as you see, but these country fusees are never any good."

"What brings you here, may I ask?" said Beamish.

"You wrote for me, sir; and, like the nobleman who went through life with a motto concealed about his person, '*I am here.*'"

"Well, as you are conducting yourself in this fashion, for my part I wish you were anywhere else."

"Now, Mr. Beamish, don't talk like that. Genius has so many penalties to pay. But I've brought news for you, sir. There was a gentleman—at least a man—at your friend's, when I arrived. He'd something as looked like a writ, Mr. Beamish. So look out for squalls, sir, and remember, if it is so, to reward the intelligent being who first signalled the enemy. Keep your starboard light wide open, and the watch always on deck."

When we got home, we found that a man *had* called at my father's house, and by his extreme anxiety about Beamish, had first of all roused the servants' suspicions, and then my father's, who had been called out to see him, as he seemed so unwilling to leave.

"Do you so very particularly wish to see Mr. Beamish?" said my father.

"Well, it's not so urgent as all that," replied the visitor, with a meaning smile.

"Can I give him any message?"

"No; that wouldn't do, I fear."

My father then, skilfully evading several leading questions, simply confined himself to the statement that Beamish was with me, sketching, and that his return was extremely uncertain.

"Can I do anything more for you?" he added.

"No," said the stranger; "it doesn't matter. I only just wanted to shake him by the hand."

It was very evident from poor Beamish's manner that the news greatly depressed him. Visions of bailiffs, sheriff's officers, and men in possession, floated through his excited brain.

"Shake me by the hand, indeed," said he. "Much more likely to tap me on the shoulder."

Next morning Beamish came down to breakfast with the appearance of one who has not slept.

Great precautions were observed in our proceedings when we started from home. The country round was carefully inspected from the house-top, and, finding the coast apparently clear, we made off towards our destination in a dejected manner, turning wary eyes on every side. Slanter carried the materials, as we had determined to have two days' more work at the north porch of the house.

When engaged at our work, Sheppard used to come slowly in and out of the house, to chat and gossip as was his wont. Tale after tale of ghostly and awful visions he had seen, of noises and footsteps that he had heard, came following one another in one unbroken flow. To-day he was especially garrulous.

"Yes," he said, "but the most unkind thing as ever happened to I, was when them pistol shots went off, and I got smothered in blood. 'Twur in that autumn when the front chimney stacks fell."

"Well?" said I.

"Well, it were autumn, and it were near midnight, and black as pitch, when as we was a lying in bed, and the wind a howling round—bang—bang—goes off a lot of pistols, and then bang again. There was a crashing fall, and all war quiet again. Well, I lay and trembled, but my old 'oman, she ups and lights a candle, and upstairs she goes with the poker (women is allus that wilful, you know). Her fumbles about in they garrets, when drip, drip, drip comes down something wet and sticky on my face. I strikes a match, and vound as it were blood. 'Murder, murder,' I shrieks: 'the blood be a coming thro' the ceiling.'"

"'Drat thee, thou fool,' says Sairah, who'd just come back. 'Tis the elderberry wine as 'ave busted and is a runnin' all over the floor.'"

"And was it the elderberry wine?" I asked.

"No, no; it was they ghosts at it again."

"But didn't you go up and see?"

"Not I, not I," said Sheppard. "I wouldn't never go into that garret on the longest, brightest summer's day as ever was."

Soon after this little refreshing anecdote, a very old man, bent almost double, came toiling up the walk.

"Who's this, Sheppard?" I said.

"Old Billy Iles, to be sure."

"Who's he?"

"Oh, that old fool down at the village as is allus so proud as his father wur hanged."

"Curious people hereabouts, Willie," I said; "and a curious thing to be proud of. But perhaps they think us just as curious."

"Ee's proud on't," says Sheppard, "cos a ain't got nothing else to *be* proud on."

"And very good philosophy, too," said Willie.

"Well, old gentleman, and what do you want?" I asked.

"I wants to know if a young gentleman called Beamish is about

'ere; cos if 'ee be, another gentleman as 'ave left 'is dog-cart down at the inn wants to zee 'un."

"What sort of gentleman?"

"Tall, round man. Dressed shabby like. A looks like a bailiff, or sort of lawyer's clerk."

Beamish turned ghastly pale.

Suddenly in rushed Slanter. "He's coming, sir, he's coming. No time to lose. Run upstairs. There is an old rickety four-post bed, big enough for ten, upstairs, with some old tapestries thrown over it; get in or under."

Up we rushed. Scuffling up the creaking staircase, through three or four passages, into a huge room, facing the bow window of which stood an enormous carved oak bed, with some mouldering tapestries thrown over it.

"Jump in," said Slanter.

In sprang Beamish. The rags were drawn over his face and body, and there he lay, looking for all the world like a corpse. Slanter and I got into an open cupboard and shut the door. Presently we heard voices. Then a prolonged hum of conversation.

As the back of our cupboard had huge cracks in it, the sound was very clear, and we could distinctly hear old Sheppard relating in his usual garrulous way the story of "The Five Mr. Fyttons" to the unknown visitor.

After a prolonged talk came a silence; then some mention of a ladder; then silence again.

Five minutes later came a fearful crash upon the window-sill, and——

A finger tapped upon the casement, a face was pressed upon the glass, and a voice said: "*The Fifth Mr. Fytton.*"

With a yell that might have raised the dead, Beamish, Slanter, and I sprang from our hiding places, to see—a jolly face. Oh, how well we knew it; and the owner was knocking for admittance.

"It's Smith," said Beamish.

"So it is," said I. "What in the world's the meaning of it?"

However, with a deep sigh of relief, we opened the casement and let him in.

"Now, Smith, explain, please. What's up?"

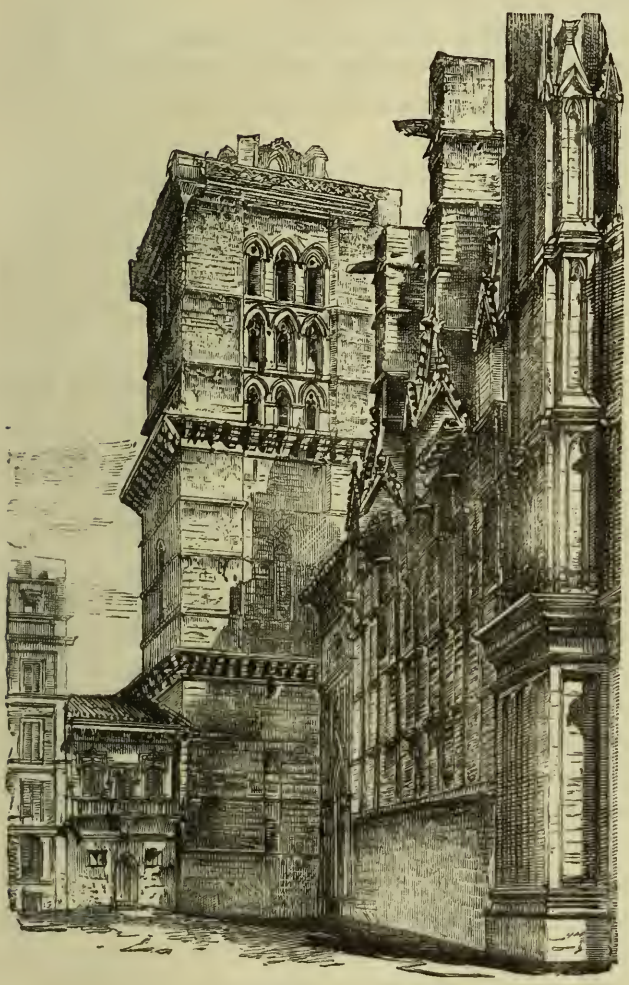
"Only, my dear boy, that I have been hunting for you for twenty-four hours to tell you that Williams, Simpson & Co., the publishers, want twenty good wood drawings of this neighbourhood, and will pay anything for them. I've got you the commission; and as for me, I'm to do the letterpress, and have been taking shorthand notes in my pocket-book ever since I came here. Old Sheppard told me that story, and that you had hidden under the bed; so I got a ladder, and here I am."

What a war-dance we had of it, and how joyfully we walked home that night! I think we all dreamt of

LETTERS FROM MAJORCA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Under Northern Skies," etc., etc.

La Puebla, June 8th, 1887.



North Doorway and Tower, Palma.

My Dear E.—Sunday night passed away. The dawn had almost broken before I concluded my last letter to you, to seek rest where now I too often find only a troubled spirit, and oblivion, which rarely comes at all. For my dreams are haunted with forms and shadows of the past.

The hour and the day arrived for keeping my engagement with Mr. Bateman. Monday morning. A. seemed neither better nor worse. He decided to go up to the Consulate until Thursday, when we are both to meet again at our palace if all goes well. I need not tell you that after having so made up his mind, neither doctors, nor sunstroke, nor any other impediment would have kept him at home. A. is not a great poet, even as H. C., as far as I know, but he is very determined.

I departed, unwilling to do so in A.'s present condition; but, under the circumstances, it was a wise arrangement. I hoped that after all, this evil would prove only a slight sunstroke, and that on my return all indisposition would have passed away.

And so once more I found myself on the one solitary railway Majorca has been enterprising enough to construct. It is slow and

sure. Accidents are unknown. Every cloud, you know, has its silver lining.

The morning was broiling, but as a compartment is always reserved for Mr. Bateman, with whom this is a weekly journey, we travelled as agreeably as circumstances permitted. Far more so, than on the day I took this journey the reverse way—for our destination this morning was La Puebla. You will remember how I there waited for the train after my arrival at Alcudia at three o'clock in the morning, pacing the platform in soul-patience and physical hunger.

We reached La Puebla, and were soon driving towards Mr. Bateman's house, which is in one of the streets of the little town. On this occasion I was far better seated than I ever had been in the lordly barouche or in a Mallorcan karrawakky.

The house is quaint and pretty. Mr. and Mrs. Lee Bateman have planned, altered, and arranged it with much artistic skill. Entering a covered archway, we were met by Rosa, to whom I must at once introduce you. Her office here is the important one of cook and housekeeper to Mrs. Bateman. She bears a romantic name, but is neither young in person nor beautiful in appearance. She is peculiar, and somewhat erratic : has phases of eccentricity, and times and seasons for their waxing and waning. At the new and full of the moon she attains her apogee of originality—a good word when speaking of lunar influences.

On the day of our arrival, for instance, she was not at all herself. It is true my advent had not been announced ; but I am not formidable, and in my calm demeanour there could be nothing to cause special aberration. Nevertheless, when Mr. Bateman told her to prepare my room, she went up with her husband, moved every article of furniture out of a large bedroom into the middle of an adjoining dressing-room, proceeded to dismantle beds, roll up carpets, and altogether caused as pretty a state of confusion as was possible. In short, she turned everything upside down.

We heard a great noise going on ; a noise as of giants above, playing at football with the furniture ; some such noise as once kept me awake at Manacor when the giants were playing football with the wine barrels. It suddenly occurred to Mr. Bateman to wonder what meant this sound of unseen artillery. Up we went on a voyage of discovery. Behold the result. Absolute chaos. A dismantled chamber, as if in preparation for a moonlight flitting. Rosa's better half was meekly obeying orders. If Rosa had commanded him to make a bonfire of the débris, he would have done so, without argument. Such conjugal obedience is beautiful—but only when on the feminine side of the house. Rosa herself was standing in the middle of this chaos, like an avenging Nemesis ; a dreamy, far off, somnambulistic look in her eyes.

"Rosa, what *does* this mean?" asked Mr. Bateman.

Then she came out of her trance, gazed about her in astonishment,

struck her forehead vacantly. Of course everything had to be returned to its place, and order once more brought out of chaos. But a dozen strange things did Rosa perform that day before the midnight hour had struck upon the midnight air. At last Mr. Bateman exclaimed with resignation :

"Rosa is very trying, but at the new and full of the moon she becomes completely irresponsible. If we expected fair weather she would be capable of bringing about the deluge."

Nevertheless I discerned that Rosa had excellent qualities. That she was fidelity itself I was informed, and that she is a very good cook I have experienced. The French say, "Il faut souffrir pour être beau;" and the proverb is only another rendering of "There is no Rosa without a thorn."

The next morning we started for the Albufera, an estate of some six or seven thousand acres, belonging to Mr. Bateman. It has been reclaimed from the marshes; has been thoroughly drained and cultivated; is now abundantly fertile and fair to look upon.

We had to pass through Alcudia, and after a long drive, approached the old town, and those ancient walls which had so impressed me on a first acquaintance with them. But it was no longer three o'clock in the morning. I was in far better condition for appreciating and enjoying these beauties of nature and of antiquity.

Again, I was charmed with Alcudia; with that rare amber shade which rests upon it and gives it so Eastern, so individual an appearance. We took photographs, and as I had stupidly forgotten the screw, Mr. Bateman performed its office for me by holding the machine upon the tripod with a firm hand.

His great height enabled him to do this to perfection. If we are not like "Beauty and the Beast" going about together, at least we resemble the "Giant and the Dwarf." I always hold it a supreme test of friendship for a man who has the slightest vanity in him, to place himself habitually in a position which draws public comparison so much in his disfavour. Can anything, for instance, look more ridiculous than for a short man to take the arm of a very tall one? But there I draw the line. Of course in leaving the screw behind me I might have done worse. I might have forgotten the lens; and no one could turn himself into a lens "at discretion." But I fear I am forgetting myself at the present moment. Camera, lens, tripod, these probably to you are words of Greek and Hebrew. You enjoy the results—as far as I am able to enclose them to you: but of the means you know nothing.

We walked round the outer walls, and were not trespassing. They belong to Mr. Bateman; are his own private and personal property, to build up or pull down, restore or demolish, as he pleases.

It were a sin to touch them in any way. They are beautiful in themselves, with a beauty I have scarcely seen equalled in any walls elsewhere. Even the wonderful walls of Wisby, in Gotland, with all

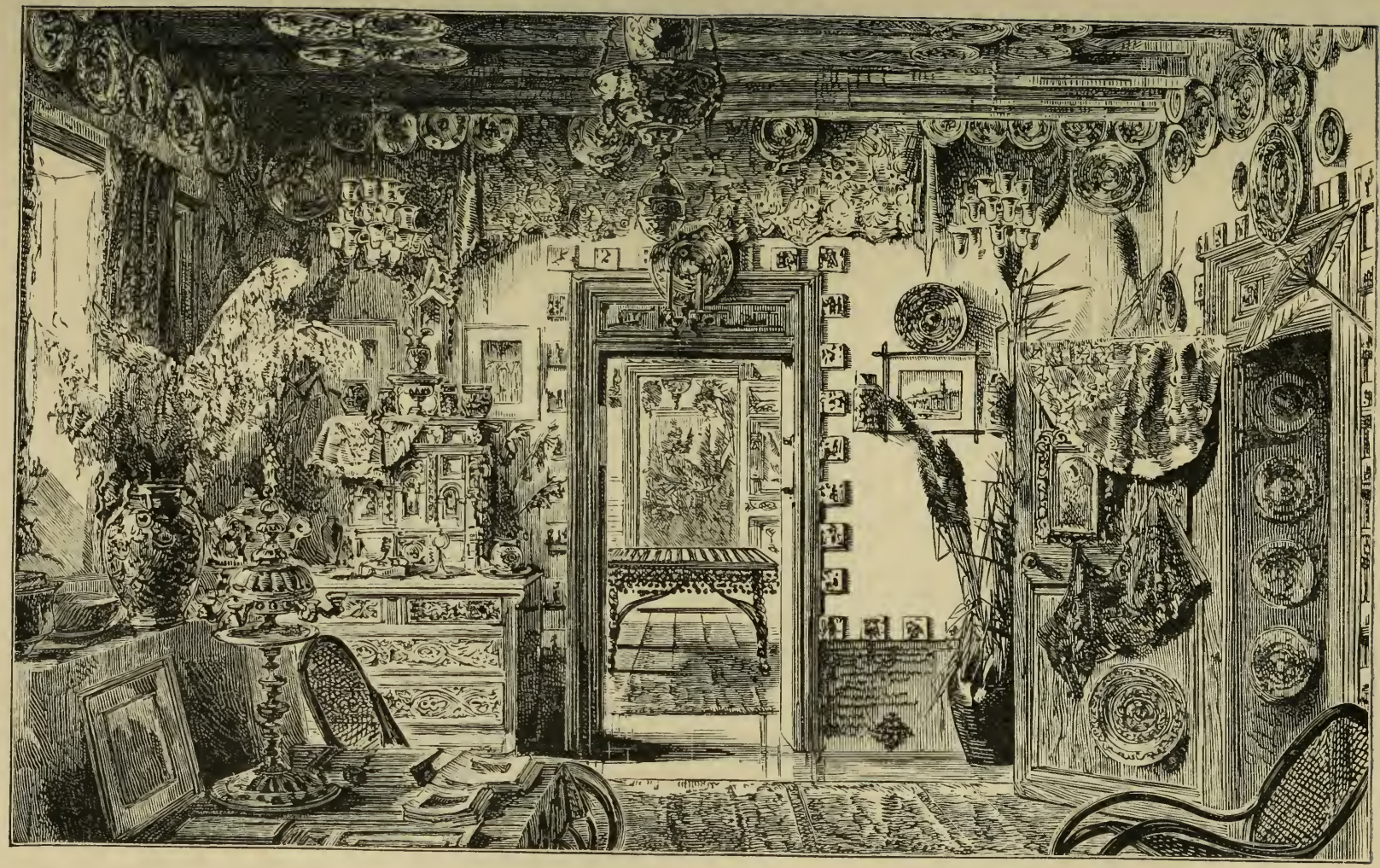
their antiquity, all their remarkable gateways and ruined towers, scarcely equal these of Alcudia. The walls of Wisby, with all their charm, are grey and cold with the influence of Northern skies and a Northern atmosphere. They appeal to the imagination chiefly by force of time and circumstance : a somewhat indirect influence.

But the walls of Alcudia have an Eastern glamour about them. You are at once enwrapped in golden visions and dreams of oriental magnificence and splendour. They are none the less powerful that here you are face to face with death and decay ; with the poverty of a small insular town of great antiquity, whose inhabitants probably for the most part live from hand to mouth, from day to day, literally needing the clause in the Prayer of all prayers : GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

WALLS OF ALCUDIA.

Here, too, we have a double set ot walls : Roman and mediæval. The moat between them is dried up and withered. Its uses have passed away as completely as the busy hands and brains that centuries ago planned them out and brought them to perfection. There were giants in the land in those days, even as in days before them : the days of the Pyramids, of the Walls of Babylon, the Tomb of Mausoleus, and all the wonders of the world. There always have been giants, it seems to me, on the earth. In our own day I suppose their strength lies in the wonders of science and invention.

Wisby's walls—to conclude the comparison—look out upon a cold and barren land, upon the pale waters of the Baltic. These of Alcudia look forth upon fertile plains ; upon distant waters running calmly up into the land in creeks and harbours ; upon chains of hills undulating and tower-crowned ; upon the broad Bay, the fair and flashing waters of the Mediterranean. For these are Southern skies,



THE CONSULATE.

where balmy zephyrs blow, and spiced gales and fruit-scented winds are prevalent. We cannot escape here the dream of the lotus-eater, even if we would. If its people are voluptuous, living the life of the senses, we must pause before we judge them, and hesitate long before we condemn.

A sojourn in these soft and subtle climes, this rainbow atmosphere, these gorgeous scenes, is inexpressibly delicious. We live in dreams beyond those of our sleep. All we possess of youth and freshness is kindled and aroused and quickened into life by its influence. Our very being and nerves are thrilled, as a harp would vibrate at the touch of a Saint Cecilia. Nevertheless, I would not live here always. A glamour is thrown over the imagination. The net of soft and sweet, but dangerous emotions holds captive one's reason. The doom of the epicurean would become ours. Give me the colder, healthier influences of the North, companionship with a race that resolutely fights the battle of life, pressing onward and upward.

Perhaps I feel it the more that these Southern influences and witcheries appeal strongly to my nature. They allure with mesmeric power; beckon me with the hand and gaze and sweet song of a syren to come and make one with their votaries. I feel their danger and I fear my weakness. Certain it is, the happiness that here falls upon me, the ecstasy that enfolds my senses, is strange and powerful; unbroken from day to day; never ceasing. All that is emotional within me would ask nothing better of life than to pass it here, steeped in this voluptuous Southern dream and influence.

But afterwards?—And the end thereof?—And the awakening, when custom has marred and age has staled the infinite variety of these charms?—What then? Dead Sea fruit, my sister; the apples of Sodom; the waters of Meribah; the bitterness of Marah. No; let these orient dreams be indulged for a season; let all that is beautiful and refined, all that is gorgeous and glowing, hold captive the imagination; but so far and no farther. Sooner or later, one must awake to realities. Life has nobler aims than the dream of the lotus-eater.

But this is a digression; I fear you may call it a rhapsody. Yet it is not so. It is born of the influence of Southern skies and Eastern atmospheres; an influence absolutely existing; certain in its enervating tendency. Yet it does not appeal to all alike; and to some cold, unimaginative, emotionless natures, it does not appeal at all. I would not be as they. These, as a rule, are shut out from all sympathy with their fellow-mortals. They cannot weep with his sorrows, smile at his joys. Never would they listen to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Rather run the danger, fight the battle, and gain the victory, though it be in fear and trembling, and with many a halting step on the edge of the precipice.

And this brings us back to the walls of Alcudia; not, you will say, before it is time. Here, indeed, we made many a false step, and there was certain danger in going too near the edge. The stairs that

lead up to them are worn away with use; you must hang on and find your level as best you can. The very walls themselves are often broken and crumbling. Their material is not imperishable. They will not last for ever.

But they are beautiful and romantic beyond description. They throw their influence and atmosphere over the town upon which we looked down. Upon narrow streets with their quaint bits of antiquity; ancient and carved doorways, and ironwork cunningly wrought. There is wonderful ironwork in many parts of Mallorca, but Palma is simply full of it.

Flat roofs, here as elsewhere, help to give the town its Eastern aspect. Some of them of course held cages for pigeons, and the restless birds wheeled round and round and flashed in the sunlight. Alcudia altogether stands out as one of the remarkable places of the world. It holds its place apart, and leaves a lasting impression on the memory: as the Alhambra, the Ruins of Pompeii, Tangiers, or Wisby with its decayed monasteries, churches, towers, and walls: a distinctive, unfading impression.

But, as I have before remarked, the less said about its people the better. You cannot put up at the inn. It is the worst, and in all ways, even in the matter of honesty, the most objectionable in Mallorca. The only way to meet the landlord, after receiving his claim, which is extortion, is to pay him the amount which appears to you justice: "referring him to your solicitor" for the balance. He may use strong language—as we had to do (I like to make it plural) to that wretched, assassinating driver in Palma; but if hard words break hearts, they do not break heads—and our hearts are safe from destruction at the hands of the landlord of the inn at Alcudia. A terrible sentence, this; something like the House that Jack built; yet I do not quite see how to point it otherwise.

We went round the walls with many a false step, I say, but luckily not any beyond redemption. We walked on, admiring, dreaming, enchanted, photographing. At last we reached the ancient gateway and looked across on to the Bay of Alcudia. No steamer was visible to-day, but there was the very spot at which I had landed; the very same officer with his gun, pacing the breakwater; the house in which I had taken temporary refuge. It was a picture of still life; almost sad and melancholy in its seclusion from the world.

Here our walk ceased. The carriage had come round to meet us. We had soon turned our backs upon Alcudia, and were bowling rapidly towards the Albufera.

A delicious drive; a delightful day. One of those days one remembers when, years afterwards, the recollection of many surrounding days and events have faded from memory.

It was somewhat of a new experience; and the only experience of its kind to be found in Mallorca. The Albufera was originally nothing but one great marsh, unproductive, uncultivated. It is

now a fertile territory, bringing forth the fruits of the earth and crops innumerable: sometimes three crops in the year. A thorough system of irrigation has been organised; excellent roads have been made; canals run through the property; immense engines are ever at their work. And all this has been done by the skill, judgment and energy of Mr. La Trobe Bateman, the father of Mr. Lee Bateman, with whom I was now making the acquaintance of the Albufera.

One of our first visits was to a long, low, rambling house upon the estate: a house in itself picturesque and interesting, that once existed for very different purposes from those of to-day. Its large garden, splendidly cultivated, full of fruit and vegetables, supplies Mr. Bateman's table at Il Tereno. In front of the house was a mulberry tree, loaded with fruit, alas, not yet ripe. Many thousands of mulberry trees grow within a short distance of the house, and the fruit sent into Palma market is much appreciated by the inhabitants.

One day, Mr. Bateman, in going over the estate, caught sight of a juvenile thief. A young girl had climbed into one of these trees for the purpose of enjoying a delicious and uninterrupted feast. Stolen pleasures are sweet—how much more stolen mulberries.

Mr. Bateman caught sight of the young lady. He was surprised, but not terrified. That was only his side of the picture. On the other side the damsel caught sight of him, and she was surprised and very terrified. She knew she was stealing; she knew the punishment was severe; and what was to be done?

She tried to hide behind a branch, but she was larger than the branch. In her agony (the agony of fear, not of remorse: how often is it not so with ourselves?) she slipped, and, like Bailie Nicol Jarvie (I can never tire of quoting him, any more than I am weary of my twentieth reading of "Rob Roy"), she remained suspended in mid-air by her dress. Legs and arms were drooping, just as you may have seen a sheep suspended as a sign over a shop doorway. The sign, I suppose, represents the Golden Fleece, though I have never seen any Jason in search of it; but there was nothing golden about the present suspension: except the lesson it must have brought home to the delinquent.

Presently her gown, being of less stable material than the Bailie's plaid, did what we all of us sometimes do under a great strain: it gave way. She fell to the soft earth with a dilapidated garment, but with a body physically uninjured. Morally, let us hope that she was improved.

Nevertheless, Mr. Bateman thought it well to impress upon his guards the necessity of greater activity and vigilance in their work.

To-day we entered the house and went upstairs. A strange sight met us: strange to myself, who, in my occasional visits to the South of France, where the creatures abound, have never chanced to come across them.

The floors were covered with beds of large, fat, white silkworms,

apparently to the extent of millions. Some were feeding upon mulberry leaves ; some had disappeared into cocoons ; all seemed flourishing and healthy.

The woman who accompanied us in our inspection was a "quaint and curious" little body, brown as a gipsy ; black, indeed, as one of that wandering race. She was sharp as a needle in her movements, and seemed as interested in the silkworms, as much at home with them, as if she, too, had originally burst upon the world from one of her beloved cocoons.

She was quaint and curious, and talked incessantly, but whether her discourse was of "ancient and forgotten lore" I could not tell. Her language was a sealed book to me. Had Mr. Bateman not understood and responded to her, I should have said that it must be sealed to all civilised beings.

I only know that absolutely diminutive as she was, her voice would have reached to the mast-head of a man-of-war in the most furious gale that ever blew. It would have awakened the celebrated seven sleepers : it ought to have aroused the dead, whether celebrated or unknown. It penetrated to the very fibres of one's tissue, the very marrow of one's bones, and set one's nerves most terribly on edge. In short I had never heard such a voice. I never wish to do so again. I tremble as I recall it. She looked something like a gorilla, but with a gorilla voice of 50,000 horse power.

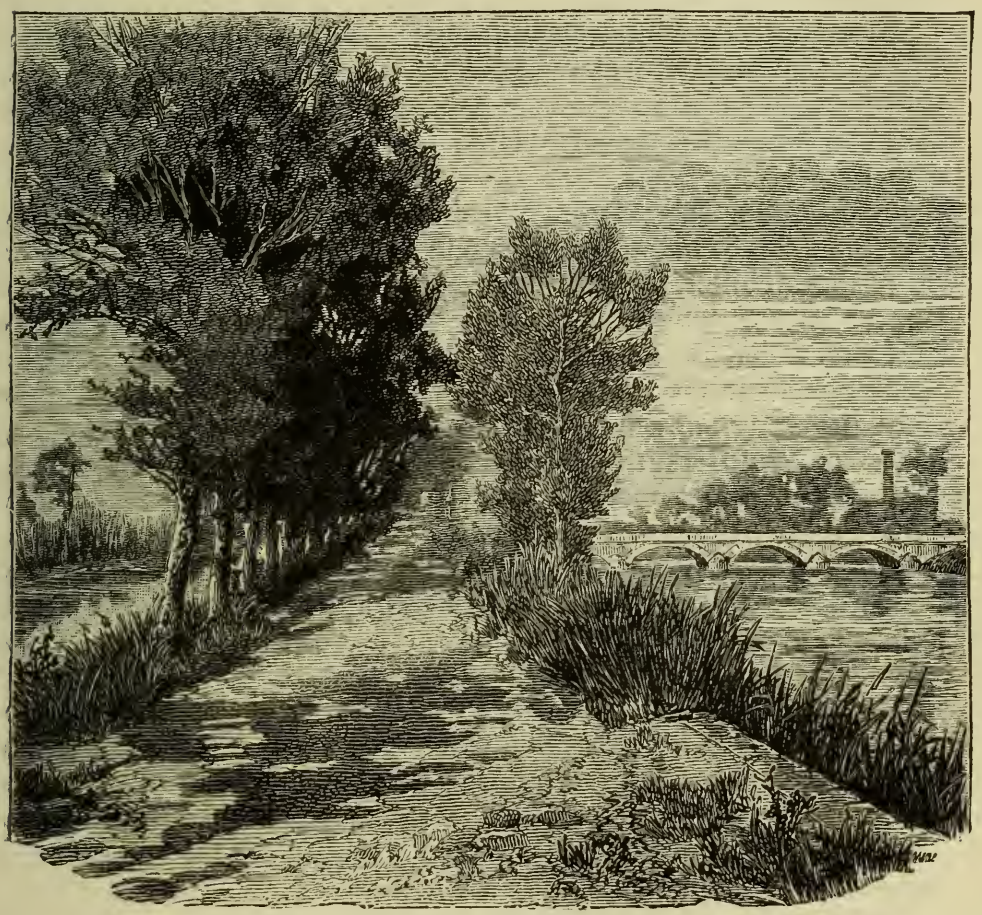
She was terribly distressed at one thing ; swung her arms about, whirled round like a dancing Dervish, until I thought she would go mad, if she was not mad already. When we discovered the cause of her grief, I think we were equally sorry, though not equally mad and demonstrative. From one side of one of the rooms, a whole bed of silkworms had disappeared. A wicked rat had come in ; or perhaps several rats ; and eaten them all up : every one of them. The vacant space told its own tale, and it really was a very sad one.

I was not sorry to leave the silkworms to the care of their guardian. Her voice haunted one—haunts one still. Whether the silkworms heard it, and knew it, and loved it, I cannot tell. Let us hope so ; for loved of gods and loved of mortals—as Daphne—that voice could never be.

It was pleasanter in the garden, where the strawberries had stolen a march upon the mulberries, and were ripe and reddening ; where all the fruits of the South flourish in their season ; where large magnolia trees, under whose branches we could shelter from the noon-day sun, bore flowers of extraordinary size and splendour, whose luscious perfume filled the air.

It was an intensely hot day. There was not the faintest shadow of a breeze ; not a cloud in the sky as large as a man's hand. An unbroken canopy of intense blue, except where the sun turned it into molten gold. Indeed, there has not been rain here for about a hundred days ; and the earth is very much burnt up in consequence.

Our morning was spent in examining the estate; admiring the magnificent crops; listening to the whispering of the reeds and rushes in the dykes; the croaking of multitudes of frogs, with singular and not unpleasant voices. The estate produces an immense amount of cane, which grows in the dykes and canals, and in all marshy places. If mills were erected here, all this cane might be turned into paper, and what is now comparatively useless, would become a great article of commerce, a source of considerable profit.



IN THE ALBUFERA.

These dykes and marshes shelter an abundance of snipe, which yield good sport in winter. This recalls to me my Shetland experiences, where I have had many a day's shooting and tramping over the moors with G., returning at sundown laden with spoil. Days, alas, that are ended. For you know how G., only a few months ago, went out to shoot plover, and after two days' mysterious absence was searched for and found dead upon these same moors. And you know how his faithful dog, for those two whole days and nights, had kept watch and ward over him, never stirring from his side: even then would not be separated from his master. What a capacity for

fidelity there is in the dumb creation. Is it because with them feeling cannot evaporate itself in words?

At mid-day we reached the engine-house, and the offices of the Albufera. Here we lunched, and met with another cordon bleu of nature's own making; a born cook of the masculine persuasion, as someone has it, who treated us to chefs-d'œuvre and delicacies: an eel stew, par excellence, that no Soyer could have rivalled. The canals here abound with eels, and at any time you may go out and capture a provision sufficient for an army.

These, the two hottest hours of the day, we spent in the cool shelter of the large and picturesque office. Doors and windows were open; a gentle current of air fanned one's fevered brow. After luncheon this was delicious repose; the true dolce-far-niente sensation of the Sunny South.

But I only was lazy. Mr. Bateman sat at the table writing letters, examining charts, entering into details with his people. I cultivated the open window in a lounge, looking out upon the fair world. Listening to a faint rustling in the leaves that might have been taken for the far-off sound of the sea. Watching the reflections of trees and bending reeds in the broad canal that stretched far downwards to the left. Admiring the wide, well made road that ran beside it, the long row of graceful trees that turned it into a sort of park-like avenue. And, of course, I pondered upon the diversity of human wisdom. How to one is given the gift of healing, to another the interpretation of tongues; how strangely each finds his vocation, falls into his own niche in the world, goes his separate way: so that the result makes both ends of the earth meet, as it were, at the close of the year.

So striking was the picture, so unlike anything to be found elsewhere in Mallorca, that to photograph it was a necessity. As usual, I shall send you the result. At the far end you will observe the buildings of the Albufera: the engine-house with its ponderous machinery and its great water-wheel ever turning for purposes of irrigation.

Just after this we passed a row of men in the small canal to the right. They were naked, and up to their waists in water, with skins as brown as those of men who live far further eastward than this little island. It was their work to clean out the canal, and to judge by their slow progress, and their struggles, their task must have been a hard one. The work is always going on in the Albufera, and as soon as one dyke or canal is done, they begin upon another.

So you see that to superintend and survey and manage such an estate as this is really a life's occupation. Labour is incessant, and thought and judgment have to be brought into constant operation. In Mallorca, too, you have to deal with a singular race. It requires tact to manage them; a firm hand; immense decision of character; a fixed purpose. Above all, it is necessary to establish

amongst them a reputation for infallibility. They will yield to this with almost superstitious homage.

That night I witnessed a strange and amusing sight in the offices at La Puebla.

Our day's drive was over. Rosa, to atone for her previous eccentricities, had put forth all her artistic skill, to which we had done justice. Her master had had her in, and praised her efforts. Praise to this singular woman is as light to the day, as a full cup to a thirsty soul. No change passed over her impassive countenance, but those few words would make her happy for a month to come.

Some time after nine o'clock the men came to the office to pay their irrigation money: small farmers who cultivate a certain amount of ground and manage very well upon it. I really don't know how many they numbered; probably not less than fifty. Only one at a time came forward. One or two would remain in the background of the office, but the greater number kept without; on the stairs and in the court below, each waiting his turn.

There has been trouble to school them into decent behaviour. At the beginning none of them had the slightest idea of the eternal fitness of things; of rendering honour to whom honour is due. They would lounge in with hats on, pipes or cigarettes in their mouths, place themselves on an absolute equality with you, take a seat, coolly offer you tobacco. In all these cases, setting aside the doctrine of rendering unto Cæsar his due, it is the tone and substance of the equality which offends.

But all that is over. To-night their manner was irreproachable as their dress was original.

To begin with, they wore their shirts outside their trousers. This is the fashion here; and if one of them wore his shirt like a decent Christian, he would not be considered in full dress.

They were all in full dress to-night. I stared very much as you may imagine; but as I was in shadow, I was able to stare and laugh to my heart's content without wounding their sensibilities. Not to laugh was impossible. A cat must have laughed at some of them; or a monk in the middle of his midnight mass; or even Galatea before she was warmed into life by Pygmalion.

Each man advanced in his turn. Those who had hats on took them off; but a few had their heads tied up in handkerchiefs, and these were not disturbed. Like a Chinaman's pigtail, they are a sign of honour.

At a table sat a clerk who received and counted each man's money. A second clerk sat at another table and entered each separate amount. Sometimes the money was all paid in copper coin, and I did not envy the hands through which it passed. Generally, the sum was tied up in a handkerchief; was duly untied in presence of the clerk, and poured out in a very substantial stream upon the table. But sometimes, and by way of variety, it was tied up in a corner of

the tail of the shirt—probably by those whose worldly possessions did not include handkerchiefs. As a result of all this, sometimes a bag of coppers as large as a corn sack has to be conveyed to the bank.

The faces of these men were peculiar. A few were decent, but many were repulsive. After all, what was to be expected of them? What else can be the result of lowly birth, coarse surroundings, hard lives and scanty fare? Here a man of fifty is wrinkled and curved and looks eighty; a man of seventy might well have come out of Noah's ark.

Whilst all this was going on, a sound of distant music rose upon the air; wild, unearthly, discordant; such as I had never before heard. People in the street began running. I wondered what it meant. What incident or excitement could be taking place in this sleepy, deadly-lively little town?

Mr. Bateman inquired of the clerks.

A funeral, they replied. A young fellow of twenty had died of consumption that morning, and they were taking him to be buried. It is the custom in Mallorca. Burial usually takes place within twelve hours of death. Very often they bury at night; simply place the coffin in the earth; and the service in church takes place the next day.

I went out to look at the procession; and strange, wild, weird, melancholy was the sight.

The coffin was borne on the shoulders of a number of young men, probably friends of the deceased. In front of the bier went the musicians, playing the most horrible, distracting, discordant music you can possibly imagine. But you could never imagine it. As if the event itself were not sufficiently sad, they did their utmost to make it simply unbearable. How those to whom the poor dead young fellow belonged endured it, I cannot tell. I think I should have died of it. It was almost enough to separate the living soul from the living body for very agony. One might almost interpret it into the wail of the departed spirit; the despairing cry for release from purgatory: for, of course, they are Roman Catholics here, and believe in purgatory. It might even have been meant to describe the torments of that region. If so, it was very well done.

They halted at every few yards; there was dead, appalling silence for a moment; then the music and the cortége went on again with renewed vigour. At the door of the house where the young fellow had lived, they made a longer pause; one of at least ten minutes; and the shrill wailing of the music might have turned the very stones of the street and caused them to cry aloud.

Following the coffin came a long string of mourners or attendants, walking two and two. They carried flaring torches of yew and pine, and trod upon cypress branches that strewed the road. The air was full of flame and smoke and the suffocating scent of burning wood. The flames threw ghastly lights and shadows around, which

fell upon the houses and flashed on the windows. Flaming branches of yew marked the road they had taken. It was almost dangerous to follow in their steps.

It might have been an incantation scene. There was something barbarous in it; wild and savage. It was pagan rather than Christian. The flames distorted the faces of the torch-bearers, danced and played about them, until you might have thought them beings of a fallen world. Their countenances were not marked by grief, though the slow march with which they kept time to the music threw over it all a certain sad and solemn aspect.

I have never seen so strange, so melancholy a procession. I would

OLD MOORISH OLIVES.

not follow them to the cemetery, but went back to my quiet work in the office, just in time to see the last of the men paying his irrigation money. So is life. For one man it is over and done with, whilst his neighbour is still occupied with the cares of the world, the struggle for existence. And no matter how hard the struggle, he is not at all willing that it should come to an end.

The next morning (this morning) I went alone to make acquaintance with Pollensa, one of the small towns of Mallorca, one of the most picturesque. Mr. Bateman was unable to accompany me, having an important engagement at the Albufera, which could not be delayed. It was our last day here, Wednesday, and each of us went his separate way.

Pollensa is about an hour's drive from La Puebla. The road on

either side is lined with olive yards. Some look old enough to have been Druidical, and date back to the days of the Moors. Ahead of us throughout the drive was a hill that might have stood for the Mount of Olives, and is not unlike it in form. It overshadows Pollensa, and might be supposed to confer sanctity upon it. It does not do so. Pollensa is said to be the most wicked old town in Mallorca. But it is the other towns that say this: and so, vulgarly speaking, it may be a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Wicked or not, of the beauty of Pollensa there can be no doubt, and it is difficult not to associate beauty of spirit with gracefulness of form.

Crowning this Mallorcan Mount of Olives is an ancient monastery, disused and abandoned, like all the other monasteries in Mallorca. It looks far above the world. It is so in fact, if compared with the level of the sea. It is ancient and venerable; grey with the lapse of time; has seen cycles roll on and generations rise and fall. It is now inhabited by a man and woman, as ancient as the monastery itself in appearance. You may go up and take your abode there; watch the sun rise and set across the plains and over the hill-tops, gilding the outlines and softening the undulations, flashing the distant sea and the waters of the harbour which run up into the land.

The landlord of the inn rather pressed me to ascend to the monastery, but I remembered the Puig Major (shall I ever forget it?), and declined the pilgrimage. True, it would have been a very different and much shorter matter: but great or small, long or short, by my own exertions, or by the help of a mule, I have done with mountain climbing.

The landlord was very good. Pollensa is well worth visiting, and possesses some curious buildings, and he took me to all. More than this, he carried my camera for me, and it was with difficulty that I insisted upon bearing the light and elegant tripod. His wife was what the Scotch would call a bonnie woman; and his children ran about —as the young children do in these places—with nothing on but a little shirt; sometimes with nothing on at all. They might be young cannibals. I don't know whether it is done from motives of economy or for purposes of hardening, but the result is not effective.

We went up to what is called the Calvaire: a hill just above the town, with winding paths and white marble crosses erected in different places. It is used, this Calvary, on days when they have a procession, and the long line of figures must be very striking as it winds upwards and halts a moment before each cross.

At the top of the hill is a small chapel, as ugly as chapel that ever was built. Near it were some small cottages, inhabited by poor, but decent people. I doubt whether I have seen anything of its kind more picturesque and romantic in Mallorca. At the door of one cottage sat an old woman. Like all these old women, she looked at least a hundred. She had a fine face, nevertheless, and in the days

of her far-off youth must have been a beauty. She was seated upon a low stool, a distaff before her, from which she was drawing the wool.

In the other doorway sat a child nursing a baby, and near her stood the mother, knitting. They all belonged to each other; grandmother, mother and grandchildren; but the daughter was more clumsy and commonplace than ever the mother could have been. Not so, however, in mind. I wished to take their photograph; the opportunity of such a picture was not to be neglected; and they received us in quite a well-bred manner. It was simply innate with them; an innate courtesy which, perhaps, is not so rare in the world as the world supposes.

The view from the summit of the Calvaire was wonderful. Pollensa was spread at our feet, looking quite large and important. We gazed upon a sea of roofs, both flat and slanting, many of them composed of those deep red pantiles which are so full of colouring and effect. The cactus plant, with its prickly fruit, abounded. Olive trees were spread over the plain. Afar off the waters of the harbour ran up into the land, and the hills divided to show the shimmering Mediterranean beyond them. We were surrounded by hills, chain beyond chain, of all forms and sizes, undulating in wavy outlines or rising sharply to a peak. The hill, crowned by its monastery, was conspicuously in the foreground, and the straggling houses of Pollensa reached to its base.

As we went back to the inn, where luncheon was a-preparing, we came upon a scene of excitement. Men and women stood about the street, talking, staring, gesticulating. From a house there went forth the most horrible sounds, the most heartrending shrieks that human voice could utter. Shriek upon shriek, howl upon howl; each appearing louder than the last.

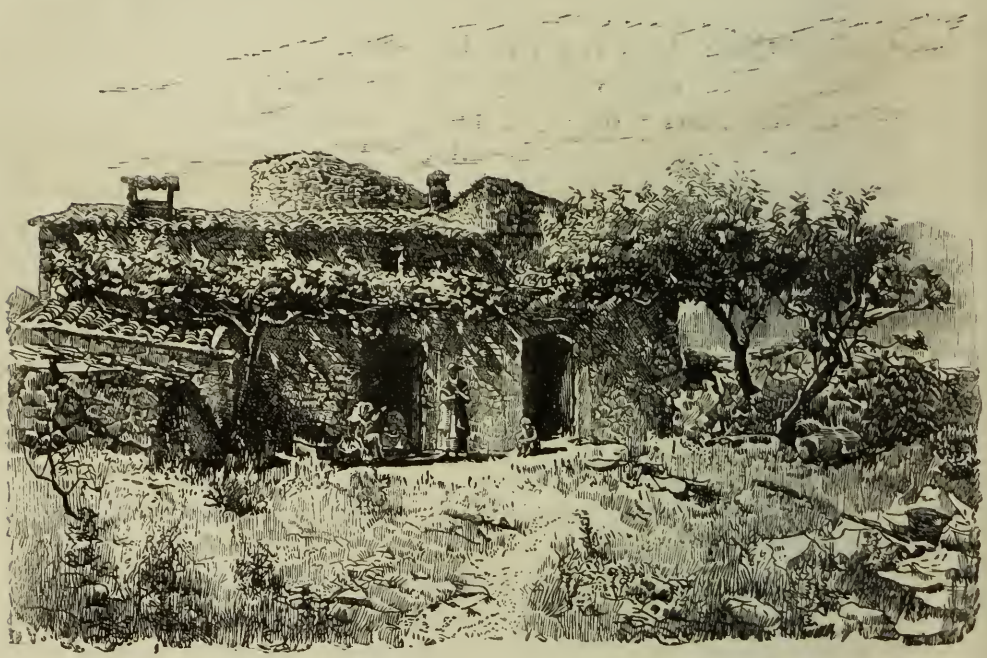
The landlord inquired into the cause of the commotion.

You will wonder how we understood each other. Fortunately he could talk French: was a man of intelligence. He, too, had once gone in for photography, but earnestly and professionally, not of the dilettante spirit of an amateur. Consequently he took great interest in my work, and carried the camera with a far more natural air than I can ever hope to attain to. It is true we were once asked in the streets of Palma whether our photographs were for sale; but I put this down absolutely and entirely to H. C.'s influence, who always went about his work in an extremely thorough, straightforward, and businesslike manner. "If I am taking a photograph," he would say, "I am not writing a poem"—an assertion I never attempted to contradict. "But whichever I may be doing, I like to do it as if it were the occupation of my life." It is clear that H. C. is destined to greatness.

To-day the landlord examined my camera with the utmost minuteness and interest. He considered it the best he had ever seen, and evidently felt that it would produce far greater results in his hands than in mine. I have not a doubt of it.

But all this time we are leaving the lady screaming and howling: for the sounds proceeded from a young woman of some twenty summers—or winters, according to her date of birth. The cause, we found, was indeed a sad one. The father had gone out that morning in his usual health, and had been brought home dead. He had a son who was a priest in the town, and we saw him at this moment hastening up as fast as his robes would allow him to do so.

These shrieks, horrible and heartrending, are the mode in which the people of Pollensa give expression to their feelings and declare their griefs. It is distressing beyond imagination, and, of course, answers no good purpose. In this instance they never ceased, and we were glad to leave them behind us.

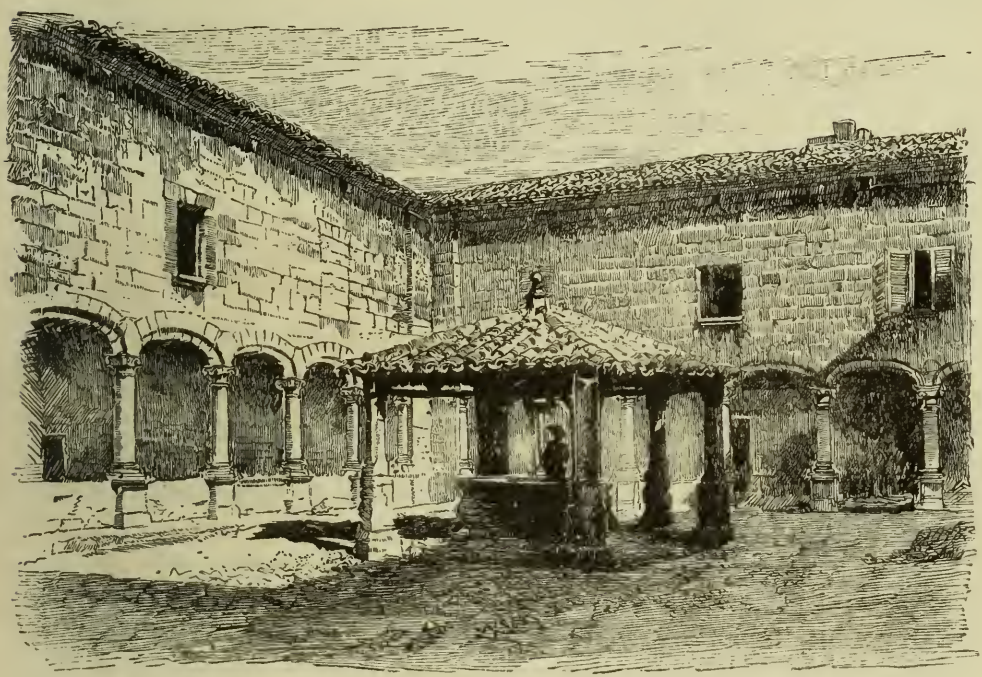


ON THE CALVAIRE.

The landlady had prepared a repast, and it was served in a room about four feet square. I cannot conscientiously say that I took it alone, for all the cocks and the hens in the yard joined me, and half-a-dozen cats and dogs; all with such evident intentions and such appealing looks, that food that was meant for me was fain to find its way to the birds and animals. There was a perfect understanding between us, and they were all on excellent terms with each other. I had never lunched with so mixed (or unmixed) an assembly, and felt very much as if the primeval days had returned. Fortunately the good woman had provided not only a superabundance of food, but some of it of so mysterious a kind and flavour, that even Oliver himself would never have asked for more. Apparently, however, there are no mysteries in the fowl world, the cat and dog creation, for these very mysteries they most appreciated.

My visit to Pollensa will always be associated with this interesting repast. Mr. Bateman had written to the landlord, commending me to his care, and couched the letter in such terms that I believe the whole poultry-yard would have been sacrificed to my rapacity, had it been necessary; in which case, I should have lost the exquisite sensation of being in a modern Noah's ark. Fortunately I am not one of those giants that we read of in fairy tales. Seven-leagued boots, and hasty puddings as large as an ocean are not in my way. I shall never wish to grind men's bones to make my bread.

After this primeval banquet, we went forth again to inspect what remained to be seen of the town. Mine host first conducted me to the desecrated church. Thereby hangs a tale. The immense build-



CLOISTERS, POLLENSA.

ing, of which it was a part, was once a monastery. We wandered through the endless stone corridors that those who have visited monasteries must know so well, in search of the keys of the building. To-day, out of the glaring sun and intense heat, they were specially grateful. One read reason in the roasting of eggs; that is to say, in the necessity for these gloomy passages in the days when the monks had a good time of it. Some of the old cells have been turned into civil uses, and here they now administer the affairs of the town. A few antiquities are hoarded up religiously; a skull and crossbones, a suit of armour, a shield and a cannon-ball, and one or two muskets of rude construction and ponderous weight, belonging, I think, to the Ancient Druids. They had certainly no business to be of any later date.

The keys procured, we entered the church. It is large, with a

vaulted roof and grand proportions, and must once have been magnificent with gildings and paintings. All this has disappeared, or exists only in those faint shadows and remnants which tell so sadly of things that have been.

An altar is still there, and above it was a modern copy of Murillo's virgin, extremely well painted. This has been done by a young artist of Pollensa, of so much talent that he has gone to Rome to study his craft. The picture stands extremely well in this large and gloomy building. Its colour is vivid yet refined. The form of the Madonna is full of dignity and grace as she seems to be soaring through liquid ether into the heaven of heavens. Her exquisite face looks down upon you with all the serenity of holiness, the beauty of a perfect soul shining out from her enraptured gaze.

The story of the desecrated church is a strange one. It dates far back in the years of the past. Monks and priests were of course devoted to a religious life. For them the pomps and vanities of the world existed not. The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, the devil and all his works, they had renounced by the most sacred vows. If we could only do so in real life by murmuring a formula of words which should exorcise the evil within, and set free the spiritual warfare for ever going on between darkness and light !

But to the story of the monks.

There came a day when a religious service ought to have been celebrated. Candles and incense and prayers, the ecstasy of devotion, the pathos of confession and the praise of thanksgiving : this is what ought to have been. Instead of that, listen to what happened ; and while you listen, spread your fan and hide your face.

These wicked monks and priests gave a masked ball in the church, and when the midnight mass ought to have been sending out its Gregorian monotone, there went forth instead scenes of riot and revelry, shrieks of laughter and shouts of dissipation ; men and women abandoning themselves to the wild pleasures and dances of the hour, the intoxication of the sparkling cup.

I pass over the scene. I dare not tell you in how short a time the sword of vengeance fell upon the wicked monks, and upon all who took part in that desecrating revelry. I dare say the account is exaggerated ; for exaggeration is the weakness of human nature and the tendency of history. Enough that the punishment was dire. The silent corridors and desecrated church are a proof that something of truth at least lies in the story. Of course it was mere fancy, but it positively seemed to me that the dark shadow of Retribution lay upon the cold, dismantled walls.

Lastly, at the other end of the town, we visited some wonderful old cloisters : the most interesting and picturesque next to those of San Francisco in Palma. These, too, must once have been part of a monastery, and silent monks must have trod their pavement and

drawn water from the well. They do so no longer. Change and decay have marked the cloisters for their own. A portion of the building is, I think, devoted to a hospital. Nuns or sisters occasionally flitted to and fro like silent shadows, on their errands of mercy. But the religious element has fallen away from the cloisters; and another portion of the building has become the ordinary dwellings of ordinary people.

This afternoon they were silent and deserted. Through an open doorway came the murmur of young voices. It was a boys' school—no doubt the town school. In the middle of the schoolroom floor, right in front of the doorway, was a poor beautiful little boy, on his knees, by way of punishment and example. The other boys were standing not far off, surrounding the stern pedagogue.

The little fellow was to me an object of compassion. He was fair of face, and had that innocent expression which seems to have been borrowed from heaven, and passes all too soon. I longed to take him into my arms and administer consolation. I fear I was bad enough to hold up a coin to him in the hope of tempting him to further insubordination by coming forward to receive it. The boy flushed and shuffled, and seemed suddenly possessed of quicksilver. At one time I thought I had conquered. He eyed me, then eyed the schoolmaster. Fear prevailed. He did not come. So I was fain to put the little silver coin on the base of a pillar; the little fellow gave me a glad nod of understanding, and we parted. But if we should ever meet in another world, I think we shall know and love each other.

It was an exquisite afternoon. The westering sun was casting deep reflections upon the cloisters. Half the quadrangle was in shadow, half in sunlight. It was the very hour for a successful photograph. A young mason, at work outside, came in to draw water from the well. We bribed him, without difficulty, to be taken. I will send you the result as soon as I have returned to Palma, and had it developed. You will observe the open doorway of the schoolroom behind the well. You cannot hear the murmur of the voices or see the kneeling penitent, as I did; but it is all there, and you must imagine it.

I lingered long in these cloisters. It was another and an enchanting world; an atmosphere altogether different from that of the town. In a moment the mind responds to the impression. It is as if some glorious picture, a page out of some soul-inspiring book, had been placed before one's vision. We are elevated into higher regions, delivered from the dross of the commonplace. We are new beings for the moment, and we spread our wings and rejoice in the freedom of this new sensation.

So I lingered here until the moment arrived when I must depart from the town, and return to La Puebla and the companion I had missed all day. When I left the cloisters the little penitent was still kneeling, but there was a rapt look in his face; I was glad to see

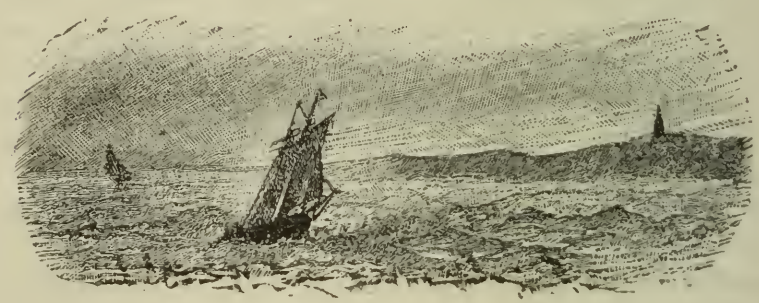
that the effect of his punishment was lost in the bliss of a future possession. We gave each other a final and affectionate nod.

It was my last impression of Pollensa, and shall be its closing record. Many hours have passed since then. Night has fallen. The stars are following the sun. To-morrow (or rather to-day) we return to Palma. What shall we find there? A. restored to health, ready for our projected drive round the island, or something very different?

During these three days we have not received a word of information; no bulletin has reached us. The old proverb says that no news is good news. In this instance, somehow, I do not think it. Something tells me that we shall return to sadness and anxious moments.

But, to-night, I will say no more. Sufficient unto the day thereof is such an evil as this, if it is to come. It has been the only shadow upon a visit that otherwise has been altogether charming in companionship and the scenes I have encountered. It is true that I have here felt somewhat more out of the world than ever; more than ever separated from you; but to hearts that beat in unison time and distance are mere expressions and exist not.

And for you and me, my sister, with our new and mighty link in the world of spirits, it is perhaps less difficult to realise that the veil separating the material from the spiritual, the seen from the unseen, time from eternity, earth from heaven, is not far off, and is quickly raised at the last. There is but one step from the dark Valley of the Shadow of Death into the Realms of Light.



POOR AUNT DEB!

By Jane Mason.

POOR AUNT DEB! Yes, that was just what I thought as I read the superscription on the small bundle of papers I found in the cabinet in her room. "A page in a life's history—to be destroyed at my death." Fancy Aunt Deb with a secret of anyone's to keep. I always thought of her as leading a comfortable, placid existence, without even a knowledge of any tragedy or soul's trouble of any sort. But, however, here's something evidently out of the common—and as she left all her possessions to "My dear niece, Jane," I don't see why I should not share the secret, and see whether she really ever had an adventure, or what this precious bundle contains.

I.

Fifteen years ago I was sitting at my breakfast-table waiting for old Robin to bring me my letters, and any scrap of news he might have picked up from our rural postman; congratulating myself meanwhile on the comfort and cosiness of my "ain ingle neuk" in this dreary November weather.

When the letters came, however, my self-gratulations came to an abrupt end. On the top of the small heap was one from my brother in Lincolnshire.

"Nov. 10th, 184—.

"Dear Deb,—Would it be too cruel to ask you to come and stay a week with me? Mrs. Kenworthy is bound to go to the help of her sick daughter, and I have no fancy for being left to the tender mercies of two giggling girls. I must also be away one night, as I am pledged to preach at A—, and cannot get home again till early the following morning.

"Your disconsolate brother,

"William Grand."

What could I say? I should prefer not to go, decidedly. But when I remembered his constant work in that lone, dreary parish, and how completely he depended on his old housekeeper for the few comforts he enjoyed, I could do nothing else but write and say I would be with him the next day.

Accordingly in the early morning we started off, my maid, Marie, and I, by a train which landed us at the nearest station to Thorsville Rectory, just as the short gloomy day was sinking into darkness. No pony-carriage, no familiar face was there to greet me; but after some

delay a conveyance was found, into which we scrambled, and were taken slowly but surely to our destination.

Here, again, I found the housekeeper gone, my brother away on his preaching expedition, and no preparations for my arrival. All this I discovered afterwards to be due to the truant propensities of the small page who is entrusted with the postage of my letters.

Feeling rather lonely and very tired, I managed to get some refreshment from a hastily improvised "tea," and then settled myself down by a warm fire to rest till bedtime.

"Please, ma'am, could you speak with a man at the door? He wants the master, and says he must see someone."

I followed the housemaid to the porch, and there saw an elderly, rough-looking individual with rather a pleasant, honest-looking face, and a style of demeanour and clothing that suggested a bargeman or one of those watermen so often met with on the canal banks.

"Oh, missus, I wanted to see th' parson. We's in a bit of trouble, and I hears he's main kind to puir folk."

"Well, my man, and what is it you want? He will not be home to-night. Can I do anything for you?"

"Please, missus," was the astounding answer, "can you do a bit of naming? We got a lass in our boat who's mortal bad; and I dunna think the young 'un can last till morning. My old woman, she thinks a deal of that sort of thing, and says that there babby ought to be named at unst, if it's to be of any use."

"Well, my friend," I answered, after settling in my own mind that he meant baptism: "I am afraid I can't do that for you—but perhaps to-morrow will be time enough."

"I s'pose it must be then, ma'am; but I doubts whether either lass or babby will live till sunrise."

Then it flashed through my mind what a dreary place it was to die in, and in a momentary impulse I offered to go and see if I could help either mother or child.

"'Deed, ma'am, if you would come, I'm sure the old 'ooman would be grateful; for this trouble came on us quite unexpected, and her has no food nor nothing fit for the poor critter."

The country round Thorsville was all familiar to me by daylight, and I knew that after crossing two fields, and walking four or five hundred yards up the road, I should then only have to cross a stile to find myself upon the canal bank. So, after donning a good thick cloak and a warm quilted hood, and filling a basket with such things as I thought might be wanted, I prepared to follow my guide down to the canal.

Then, telling the old man who acted as factotum in my brother's household to follow at a distance, I started off.

The two fields grew longer than any four; the stiles seemed impassable barriers; and the road, when we reached it, looked endless, flat, bare, foggy, utterly silent, treeless, save for a few pollards

standing here and there like dismal ghosts, with arms uplifted in a warning manner. How cold I grew! All the sympathy I had felt when standing in the warm, well lighted Rectory porch oozed out at my fingers' ends. But we Grands are no cowards by training or descent; so I determined to go on, only wishing in my heart that old Thomas wasn't quite so deaf and lame as I knew him to be.

We reached the last stile, and climbing over it I saw the dark barge lying on the canal: a great lumbering object with only one ray of light in a sort of cabin, something below the level of the deck. Crossing a shaky plank, in rear of my guide, I found myself face to face with an old woman not quite so pleasant-looking, and decidedly rougher in manner than my first friend.

"Who be this, Jim?" was a salutation not altogether cheering.

However, "Jim" told her in a few words who I was, as far as he knew, and then pushing open a little door, she went down a few steps, and ushered me into a small apartment about twelve feet by ten.

There, stretched on a miserable bed, with no covering save an old quilted counterpane and one or two filthy rugs, lay the most lovely girl my old eyes had ever looked upon!

Her small oval face, even in that wretched light, shone out in striking contrast with the sordid surroundings. Her soft hair lay damp and matted on her fair forehead, and the touching expression of hopeless resignation made my heart throb with compassion till I could find no words to speak.

"I'm afeard her's mortal bad," said the woman pityingly, but roughly; "but I think her's sleeping now."

Then, slipping down the coverlid, she went on: "The young 'un won't live an hour." And there, in the girl's arms, was a little waxen image of the mother, but oh! so white and wan, that even my inexperienced eyes knew that the seal of death was upon it.

"Who is she, and what brings her here?" I said, quite sharply, for I felt there could be no kinship between these two women.

"Oh, it's all right, ma'am," she answered in a very reticent manner. "I was just giving her a lift down in the barge, when she was taken ill. I've done the best I could for her."

"But where, and who, are her friends?" I persisted.

"Oh, m'appen they ain't far off;" and as she spoke the girl opened her eyes wide, and I knew by the way she glanced at the woman that she trusted in her, despite the odd surroundings. My fears that she had been subjected to any ill-treatment at their hands subsided at once.

Then, as her glance wandered on to me, I saw a sudden flush sweep over her face, only to die away as quickly to the deathly pallor that had so startled me.

"It's only a kind lady who has come to see you, dearie," said the woman. But as she spoke, I saw the girl was lapsing again into partial

unconsciousness, and I knew that if life was to be kept in her she must have proper nourishment at once.

I then mixed her some arrowroot and wine from the store I had brought, and went round to the far side of the bed to lift her head. As I did so, I noticed very distinctly a red triangular mark upon her throat; not freshly done, but evidently a life mark, but so clearly impressed upon the white skin, that it remained in my mind after many other details of her appearance had passed away.

Lifting her head gently, I fed her with the restorative, spoonful by spoonful, till once more the mist seemed to clear from her eyes, and I knew that she was gazing quietly and steadily at me. Fearing to excite her, I asked no further questions, but only settled her more comfortably in the bed. Glancing once again at the still sleeping babe, I emptied my basket of its contents, and quietly drawing the woman outside the cabin door, told her I would return with my brother in the morning, and see what more we could do. The woman looked at me very earnestly, and just said: "The Lord reward you, ma'am—good night," and so we parted. She disappeared into the cabin; and I, marching on ahead of old Thomas on my homeward way, wondered who the girl could be, and determined to know all about it next day.

I awoke early, with my mind filled with my strange acquaintances of the night before. Dressing hurriedly, I proceeded to look out of my travelling trunk what clothing I could spare, and made them up into a small package, not thinking it expedient to tell my maid too much about it till the matter was more fully explained.

Ten o'clock struck, then half-past, then eleven, and still William did not come; so being able no longer to curb my impatience I started off again to the canal bank, with Marie carrying the bundle beside me. When I reached it—lo! *no barge was there*—not a vestige of anything; save a trampled space on the bank, showing where the old horse had wandered as far as his tether would allow; a few bits of refuse on the canal bank, and a deep indentation in the shelving edge of the grassy towing path!

Perfectly bewildered; half fancying girl, baby, bargee and woman had all been a disordered dream; I retraced my steps to the Rectory, and there poured the whole story into the ears of my returned and half sceptical brother. He was very kind and sympathetic, but I felt that he thought I had imaged the half of it, and that in reality the lovely girl was an ordinary bargee's daughter, and the trouble one that overtakes them only too often.

II.

It was the Exhibition year of '51—a time when exhibitions were indeed marvels. That beautiful glass house in Hyde Park was to many the realisation of a fairy story; and all who could do so flocked

up to London to see if the building large enough to enclose a growing forest tree was indeed to be believed in. I, too, had a great longing to see this wonder; but when a woman closely borders on seventy years of age, and has spent most of those long years in the seclusion of a country home, she hesitates to trust herself into such a whirlpool as London was that year!

My hesitations, however, were all extinguished by receiving a most pressing invitation from Lady Grand, asking me to spend a week with them—promising me a sight of the Exhibition on the opening day—a couple of dinner parties; and that the rest of my visit should be as gay, or as quiet, as I liked to make it.

Never can I forget that opening day! The crowd—the brilliancy—the soul-stirring music—the quaintly-dressed Ambassadors from strange Eastern lands—the universal air of enjoyment and gratification on every face, made the scene one to be not easily forgotten. Then, again, the sight of our young Queen and her noble husband, filling their exalted position so proudly, and yet so graciously, made my old heart quiver with loyalty, and I prayed God earnestly to bless them with many years of happiness together!

What an endless day it seemed, and how rested I felt when I was once again in the quiet brougham driving back to Chester Square.

"Aunt Deb, we are going to have a lot of nice people to dinner to-night, so be sure and get a good rest before eight o'clock," said my niece. "There is one person, in particular, I want you to see—Sir James Nigel's wife. She is reckoned one of the loveliest women in London this year."

"Is she, Beatrice, dear?" I said indifferently. "I hope her husband matches her."

"Oh, yes, Auntie, he's good looking enough, but such a racketing, good-humoured fellow. He's more like a boy than a man, and she is, oh! so quiet and spirituelle-looking. They do make such a funny pair."

"Who was she?" was, of course, my next remark. I have often wondered whether we women would not make that remark if we were introduced to an angel unawares.

"Oh, she's a lady, Aunt Deb, but no one knew much of her till she married. I think an artist's daughter, but certainly an orphan. She had lived for several years with her only living relative, a maiden aunt, who has a pretty little place down in a Shropshire village, where Sir James, before his father's death, used to go for fishing and shooting with a college chum. They are not much in town, for she prefers a country life, and he is devoted to sport of all sort; but when they are up, we see much of them, for Tom and he are great friends."

By this time we had reached No. 90, and I went at once to my room, and gave myself up to a well earned rest, till my maid came in to make preparations for my appearance at dinner.

The drawing-room seemed crowded when I entered, so I sat down near to the door till my niece came round to me bringing an elderly, grave-looking man to be introduced. When we were fairly settled down in our allotted places at dinner, I began to look about the table, and presently bethought me of the beauty. But there were so many épergnes and flowers between our *vis-à-vis* and ourselves, that for a time I could see little but the crowns of the men's heads, and the elaborate head-gear of the ladies.

The menu slowly dragged itself through, and then in a space made by the re-arrangement of one of the large dishes so much in vogue in the year of which I speak, I saw *a face*. A face that in one instant brought back to my mind with startling distinctness that night scene on the Lincolnshire canal—the dreary coal barge, the sick girl, and the dying babe.

There was the self-same golden curly hair, the deep sparkling eyes, the lovely delicate skin, the broad brow. And yet, how could it be the same woman? I thought of the simple cotton garment she wore, the miserable bed in which she lay, and then glanced again at the elegant attire of my opposite neighbour. The pale blue crape dress, the delicate bertha of French lace caught on the shoulder and breast with sprays of pink apple blossom. Round her neck a broad black velvet band, with a glittering pendant of opals and diamonds.

My brain seemed to reel with the intensity of my bewilderment. And while I looked, as though my cup of wonder should be filled, I saw her raise her hand, and, evidently a relief from the heat of the crowded room, she lifted the velvet band around her throat, and then with perfect distinctness I noticed the triangular red mark.

I suppose I must have attracted her attention by my earnest gaze, for I saw her grow restless and look at me again and again. Then as if a curtain had been raised from the past, I saw too, in one instant, that *she* was present with me in that long-past scene.

At last the weary meal drew to a close, and as I crossed the hall, I heard a voice say very gently: "May I speak to you somewhere?"

Not trusting myself to answer, I led the way to my own room, and there, by the light of the small fire that was burning on the hearth, despite its being May-time, we looked at one another in perfect silence, till at last she spoke.

"You remember me?" she said.

"Yes," I answered simply. She was so fair to look at and so *good* looking, in the highest meaning of the word, that I could not suspect her of evil; and yet what could I say?

"That page in my life's history has become to me a dream," she went on; "a dream from which I thought there was no awakening this side the grave. Why! oh, why should it not remain so? There are none now living, I believe, who know it but you and me. It seems as though I should live through all that misery again in telling it to anyone."

"My child," I answered gravely: for her six-and-twenty years seemed nothing to me who had passed so many more of life's milestones: "you may rest assured your secret will still only lie between you and me, as far as I am concerned. But—do you do wisely or well to keep such a secret back from your husband? A secret, too, which has in it so many elements of scandal and malice should it become known in any other way."

She stood quite silent for a few minutes with the sad look deepening on her face. Then she turned suddenly and cried out:

"You are right—you are right. I have acted as a fool, and sometimes the weight of it seems to drag me down, and yet I cannot tell my husband, though I love him so dearly. He is so young and so impulsive in character, though really older than myself, that he would never rest till someone was punished for that which can never be repaired. No! I cannot tell anyone. And yet," she went on, lingeringly, "I could not bear that *you* should think of me with anything but compassion. To you I owed my life that bitter night, when exhaustion and sorrow were slowly sinking me into my grave. I will tell it to you."

So saying, she slid down to the rug at my feet, and shading her face with one hand, holding mine tightly clasped in the other, she told me in a heart-broken manner of the sorrows of her youth.

"My father was a distant member of a noble family; his wife a Hungarian girl whom he loved for her beauty and goodness only. While life was sunny and bright for both, he steadily increased in fame as an artist of no mean order. But after her death, when I was but two years old, his grief and loneliness were so great amongst a busy world, that he left his old associates and settled down in the lovely Lake country—painting just enough to keep the wolf from the door with the help of a small annuity that came to him from the family estate.

"We had no neighbours save the kindly poor. He educated me solely himself. Constant association with a man of his culture, and life amongst scenery so elevating, taught me much that books could never teach, but I was certainly dreamy and unpractical. The only visitor I remembered when I began to grow up was a man fifteen years my senior. He was of genial, pleasant manners, and came from time to time to spend long summers in the village. Being a fellow artist, he ingratiated himself with my father until he became quite an authority in our small household.

"Whether they ever exchanged any confidences as to the reason of their living such secluded lives, I cannot tell. But in course of time he gradually ceased to leave the village at all; and I grew to obey and defer to his opinion as much as I did to that of my father himself.

"Our daily life was so monotonous and simple that I never dreamed of change of any sort, and never thought that anything could

occur to break the even tenour of our way. But ah! my friend, most cruelly was my belief shaken. A day came in which the shining sun had no more warmth for me—the sweet sights and sounds of life fell on deafened ears!

"It was my seventeenth birthday, and we three had planned a drive of many miles to Ullswater Lake, and then a day of boating and sketching. I, in my excitement at such an unusual excursion, had risen early, prepared the breakfast and planned what preparations old Elizabeth should make for our evening meal, when I thought how slow my father was in coming down. I ran upstairs, singing as I went, and entering his room, with a jest upon his laziness, I found him—how? Dead! Still and cold just as he had laid himself down to rest. I thought he had fainted.

"Death had never come near to me, and I knew not the strange visitor. True, my girl-mother's death had often been alluded to by him, but in such a simple, tender manner that I only thought of her as just removed one step from us—one step higher on the Jacob's Ladder that reaches from earth to Heaven: God's good angels nearest to Him, and our lost friends just beyond the clouds.

"I cannot now tell you all his departure meant for me. Our home was broken up, and what little fund was realised was to be the means of taking me to an aunt who lived all alone in wilder parts of Shropshire.

"Then John Verney, who, in the time of emergency, had made all arrangements for me, and whose sympathy and care was so doubly precious in my loneliness, asked me if I was willing to be his wife and continue to live in the north country, which my father's grave made dearer to me than any spot on earth.

"I look back now with wider opened eyes, and wonder how even I, in my utter ignorance of the world's ways, could have agreed so quickly; have consented in two months' time to vow in our little church to be the wife of a man I really knew so little of.

"For another twelvemonth all went well, and I was as happy as I could expect to be considering the ever present sense of my father's loss, when a horrible awakening came to me. I found that I was no wife at all. Another woman, years ago, had married him, and to escape her temper and extravagance, he had fled and left her. Long had she sought him. And now in this quiet spot, under an assumed name, where he had lived first as our neighbour, and then as my husband, she found him once again.

"Oh! that scene in all its bitterness, how it comes to me again! I listened to their words till my heart stood still to hear, and I fled to my room.

"I remember a dim, instinctive feeling, that now my father's sister was all I had to trust to. Half unconsciously; driven on by some mad impulse, that came I know not how; I gathered together a few of my possessions, emptied my childish money-box of the little hoard

that had been accumulating for years, and in the dim twilight stole out from that cottage a girl no longer, but an outraged, despairing woman.

"How the long toilsome journey comes back to me now. I travelled partly on foot, and partly by coach, when such accommodation was to be met with, till I found myself at last on the outskirts of a large town through which a canal ran. On its banks I have still a recollection of resting before I sought a shelter for the night.

"God knows why I chose so dreary a spot for a resting place; but He, in His mercy, brought me rough but honest friends where least I might expect to find them. There, on that lonely water's edge, I realised how unfit and unable I was for such a journey. I suppose I must have fainted, for I remembered nothing more till I found myself in the small cabin, which for many more days sheltered me from certain death.

"The old boat woman, with the tenderness of the most noble lady, had seen me there; and guessing, doubtless, from my travel-stained look that I was a stranger in the place, had taken me in and done her best to restore me to consciousness. Then I told her as much as I could of my story, and being unable to move I lay there till the tiny babe, which should have been the source of so much joy and thankfulness, was ushered into this world of sorrow amidst these strange surroundings. The good woman told me its hours were numbered, and that if the barge could reach some village in time, she would send for the clergyman and have it duly baptised."

"But why didn't she tell me that, and wait next morning to see what we could do for you?" I said.

"Ah, I can scarcely tell. I remember your face of compassion. And then, in the early dawn, when I was gaining some little strength, I found we had travelled many miles down the canal, as the barge was obliged to reach a certain place by the following day. My poor little child had breathed its last, and when we reached the unlading place, she and her husband arranged for its burial in the appointed place in their own names. I stayed in their humble home for some weeks; and then, after giving them all the little sum of money I possessed, save what I needed for my journey to the country town of A—, I left them with my heart full of gratitude for their compassion to a lonely stranger, and found myself in a few hours at my aunt's door.

"How pleased she was to see me, how she recognised me by my likeness to her long-estranged brother, it is unnecessary for me to tell you. But I could not unburden my heart of all its sorrows. They seemed too deep for words to tell. And she, good kind soul, never enquired very much, thinking I had stayed with friends or neighbours. So the matter sank quietly into oblivion. Her delicacy of health was so great that my presence and service came to her

as a priceless boon. Amidst new scenes and the quiet, peaceful atmosphere of the invalid's room, the old wounds, that had cut so deeply, slowly healed over.

"Six years slipped away, and then, amongst the circle of friends who brightened our quiet lives, I met my husband. He was to me such a revelation of happy, joyous life, that had known no sorrow or gloom, that my saddened heart seemed to gain fresh life and vigour from his presence. In another year we married, and, to this day, I have never lifted the veil from that dreary past. The boatman and his wife I could never hear anything more of. They were both old, and talked of returning that year to Scotland to end their days amongst their own friends. Of you, I had but the faintest recollection, never having heard your name; but the good woman told me how the nourishing food and stimulants you brought seemed to give me the power of struggling back to life again."

I had listened to her story almost without comment. It was so strange, and yet not quite improbable; while of the truth—the absolute truth—of every word I could entertain no doubt. Her manner of telling it had *truth* unmistakably stamped upon it. I could not, however, refrain from urging her once again most earnestly to seek some opportunity of telling her husband all she had told to me.

For a time my words had no effect. Then, suddenly throwing her arms around me, she said: "I will! I will! I know he loves me dearly; and with your help and testimony, if he likes to prove it all, he can do so."

"Most willingly will I do everything I can for both of you," I answered. "But be sure, too, that my lips are for ever closed on this subject to all the world beside till that day when all secrets shall stand revealed."

From that hour to this I have never seen her again. Whether she ever told her husband, I cannot tell; but this I do know from my niece, that she and Sir James are still all in all to each other—happy in their beautiful home; happy in the possession of children and hosts of friends. May God ever keep her so.

I dropped the papers in astonishment. What an odd story. To think of Aunt Deb being dragged into such a romance as this. There must have been something more in the old lady than I ever gave her credit for, or how could she have carried such a secret with her to the grave? I, with the more flippant tendencies of the present day, must have found out what was the end of it all—whether she told her husband; whether he ever came across the perfidious Verney—and perhaps I should have ended by creating a disturbance that would have furnished gossip for the society journals for months to come. I think, however, I still have the grace to see how much *nobler* and wiser was the reticence of poor Aunt Deb.

MR. GORDON: SPECIALIST.

By Ella Edersheim.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. FARRINGDON GRIFFITHS.

"REALLY, Virginia! Leaving alone your duty to your neighbour, I must say that you owe it to me, as your mother, to consider your appearance a little more. Why, you look thirty, positively nearly your own age, to-night! And why I am to go about branded as an old lady, because you choose to neglect the means Providence has placed in your power to enable you to perform your duty, I cannot conceive! What have I done that I should have such an inconsiderate daughter? Was it my fault or my crime that I married your father when I was only seventeen, and that you, ungrateful child, were born but a year afterwards? I can't go about and proclaim that to everyone. I can't go round the hotel, and say: 'Though my daughter is thirty-one, and looks it, I am only forty-nine.' No, Virginia. —— But now, kindly make haste. The dinner-bell will sound in a minute, and if we are not punctual, those odious Harpers are sure to try and spite us and take our places."

While Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths had been speaking, her daughter had once more turned to the mirror, and by the help of a candle, whose radiance was but dimly perceivable against the glow of the twilight, was giving certain swift and effective touches to her hair and face. She drew the little aureole of fair curls that crowned her small head lower down over her forehead; her eyebrows became slightly more distinct; her pale cheeks faintly flushed.

Her mother rose, and looked over her shoulder approvingly.

The looking-glass, small in proportion to the room occupied by the ladies high up in the Bär at Grindelwald, impartially reflected the two figures. As Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths remarked, they would easily have passed for sisters. In spite of the years between them, the elder lady's comeliness of form and selection of attire made her appear almost her daughter's junior. There was a vivacity in her eye, and an enthusiasm in her manner, which Virginia altogether lacked. Virginia was a weak, yet pretty little person, entirely the opposite to her mother in all things; and, indeed, as that lady was often heard to declare, the very counterpart of the late Mr. Farringdon Griffiths.

"Yes; I think you will do now," said the elder lady, as she criticisingly turned the small figure round and round before her, giving a pat here, and a pin there, as her fastidious eye directed. "It's wonderful how dependent you are on colour! And I," with

a complacent glance at the mirror, "can wear almost anything. Last night in that green gown which you insisted on buying contrary to my advice" (Virginia unprotestingly bore this charge, which was totally without foundation), "you looked actually frightful. I never saw anything so unbecoming in my life. So unfortunate that you should have put it on just that evening above all others, when there was dancing! I saw the Harpers exchanging whispers—nasty spiteful things!—as we came in at the door. I know they were congratulating each other on your appearance. And they were looking so well themselves in those pretty heliotrope gowns. Certainly they have remarkably correct taste. But then they can't dance. Anything so ungraceful as the way they pranced and jumped about I never wished to see! Now I will say this for you, Virginia, I have given you the best lessons, and you do them credit. You dance beautifully. It's the only advantage you have in being small. You can't come into a room well, and when you're there, you're lost. But you can dance well with any man, be he big or little. By-the-bye, who was that tall man with the brown beard that you danced the Lancers with? He seemed very agreeable."

"I don't know who he is, mamma," Virginia replied. "But he certainly does seem very pleasant. He sat next me in church this morning, and lent me half his hymn-book."

"Eh? What's that?" cried Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths, wheeling suddenly round again from the dressing-table, where, paying but little attention to what her daughter's answers might be, she had been occupying herself with the small brushes that lay about. "Sat next you in church, and lent you his book, do you say? Why, Virginia, you have made a conquest! I verily believe that at last my prayers are answered, and my daughter has an admirer."

Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths devoutly turned her handsome eyes upwards, and then brought them suddenly down to bear on her daughter.

"You should be grateful to me, for this time I have not clashed with you," she said. "I have given up dancing; it is too warm work for a woman of my complexion; and I was not in church this morning. Why, child, you are absolutely blushing! Dear, dear, dear, dear! I do believe that it's a *fait accompli*. Here!" hastily snatching up some wild flowers that Virginia had brought in from an afternoon stroll, and deftly fastening them into the bosom of her daughter's gown. "That gives a touch of colour. Now, come along. If it is to be, it will be."

And to the sound of the clamorous bell the two ladies entered the table-d'hôte room, hand in hand.

A good many of the guests had taken their places. The chairs above the two seats reserved for Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths were already occupied by a party of dowdy-looking ladies, who were excitedly discussing among themselves the exorbitance of the charges to which

they had been obliged to submit in the last hotel where they had sojourned. With a self-sacrifice wholly alien to her character, Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths prepared to place herself beside these, leaving the chair next an unoccupied, and therefore still promising, place to her daughter. Virginia tactlessly and persistently resisted this movement on her mother's part, until the elder lady's whispered remark sank her with a vivid blush on to her appointed seat.

Scarcely had her colour subsided, and the tittering of the Miss Harpers opposite been quenched in the first mouthful of soup, when the tall, bearded stranger entered the room. After a rapid glance round the now crowded tables, he apparently discerned the Farringdon Griffiths, for without further hesitation he strode up to them, and with a pleasant smile and word of greeting, possessed himself of the vacant chair.

The dinner passed very happily to Virginia. Her neighbour, as her mother soon discovered, was a Scotchman, and a good talker. He had evidently travelled a great deal, was well acquainted with life in America, and had many stirring adventures by land and water to relate. As Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths sat with Virginia on the big balcony after dinner, she thus concisely expressed herself of the opinion which she had formed during the meal of their new friend :

"A professional man, and very gentlemanlike, my dear. Quite worth following up. We must find out who he is."

At this moment the inconnu once more made his appearance. He had put on a little travelling-cap, and held a cigar, which Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths at once mentally pronounced to be of excellent quality, between his fingers.

"Don't you find it chilly, sitting?" he suggested in his soft, Scotch voice. "Wouldn't you like to take a little turn up and down?"

"You are very kind," Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths responded graciously ; "but really I am somewhat tired after the heat of the day. And it is so refreshing to sit here quite idle and watch those curious shadows the moon throws upon the snow mountains. But Virginia, my dear. Perhaps you are cold. Careless mother that I am ! Had you not better walk about for a little?"

Virginia turned to her mother for further direction, and catching in the moonlight the most peremptory expression of command upon that lady's face, she rose, and wrapping her shawl more carefully round her shoulders, prepared to follow the stranger.

He was a professional man. That she already knew. For her mother's sure judgment never erred or failed, and Virginia had implicit confidence in it. But to what particular profession did he belong, and what was his name? She felt that these were facts left to her to discover, and she knew that explicit information would be required, nay, demanded of her when she was once more under the parental wing. But how set about discovery?

They had walked up and down the long balcony for some time,

pleasantly discussing nothings : the discomforts and inconveniences of travelling in Switzerland in summer, the hospitable comfort of the Bär, the beauty of the surrounding country. Virginia had gathered that her friend was enjoying a short summer holiday, snatched from amongst his professional duties ; that these were carried on in London ; nothing more.

They sat down on a bench. Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths had disappeared, but Virginia knew her mother well enough to discern that this was part of a plan which she must in nowise thwart by following her indoors.

The stranger was relating anecdotes of his boyhood, to which Virginia was giving a gentle appreciative attention. His cigar had gone out, but he had forgotten to relight it. He sat leaning forward on the bench, slightly turned to face Virginia, waving the cigar-stump as a happy means of gesticulation. The Miss Harpers passed in boisterous conversation with a raw youth, but Virginia was too much absorbed to heed them.

"I assure you," the stranger was saying, "that it was this circumstance—" he was referring to the deafness of an old nurse—"that first turned my attention to the diseases of the human body."

"A doctor !" she exclaimed rapturously to herself. "How clever mamma is ! She never makes a mistake."

"And, Miss Farringdon Griffiths," he pursued. There was a certain well-bredness, Virginia thought, in his distinct and slow enunciation of the two names with which her mother had encumbered them. "There is something I should like to say to you, if you won't mind. I have noticed that your mother is a little deaf."

Virginia started and paled. Was it possible that this, the only sign of approaching age that Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths exhibited ; a sign which she herself apparently had not noticed ; a sign which Virginia had strenuously striven to hide even from her own observation, calling herself coarse and unfeeling in noticing what was, after all, such a very slight defect ; was it possible that this had been remarked almost immediately by a stranger, who had had scarcely any opportunity for judging? It amounted surely to divination !

Her breath seemed to leave her, and she could not speak. The stranger continued as though he did not notice her distress.

"But I have very strong suspicions that her deafness is intimately connected with my specialty. You must know that in my own line I think I may venture to call myself a discoverer. And I have known and remedied similar cases. Now just you take my advice. Next time you are in London come and see me. I will put her all right for you. And it will give me real pleasure to see you again and to renew our pleasant acquaintanceship. I can't tell you how happy you've made my Sunday. I little thought when I came up from Interlaken last evening what there was in store for me. It is a matter of the deepest regret to me that I am obliged to start for England

to-morrow. I dare not leave my partner longer alone, for I have only recently set up in London, and a great deal remains to be done. But I shall see you again, Miss Farringdon Griffiths. Promise me that you will bring your mother to see me in London."

He had taken a card-case from his breast pocket and was scribbling an address in the corner of the little slip of pasteboard. But Virginia could scarcely see to take it from him for the tears that were filling her eyes. Tears were never far from the surface with her, and the heat and excitement of the day, the stranger's discovery of her horrible secret, and his subsequent kind words had been almost too much for her sensitive little heart.

It was well that the moon had considerately withdrawn her light, so that Virginia's condition was not discernible. Fearful, however, of betraying herself if she remained any longer, she hastily rose, drew her shawl round her, took the card from her companion's hand, left him with a murmured word of farewell, and escaped to her room.

When Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths retired for the night, she found Virginia already safely in bed, and apparently fast asleep. But the curiosity which she had with difficulty repressed through the evening was partially gratified, for on the dressing-table lay a gentleman's card on which was neatly inscribed : Mr. Gordon, 27, Sefton Gardens, W.

CHAPTER II.

MISS FARRINGDON GRIFFITHS.

When in her mother-country, Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths' small means obliged her to lead a quiet and retired life in a country village. All the year round did she and Virginia screw and pinch, and grudge themselves each small luxury, almost necessary, of life, that every now and again, perhaps once in the two years, they might enjoy a trip abroad : live for one short month as others lived, without privation or economy : their story of narrow means, home dress-making and a general servant, unknown and unsuspected.

It was money well spent, Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths had felt in the old days, when Virginia was quite young and tolerably pretty. Everyone knew that there was no place like a mountaineering hotel for securing a suitable husband.

But the years had passed, each celebrated spot in Switzerland had in turn been visited, and still Virginia had attracted no attention.

And now Virginia was losing her youth. Her mother reluctantly admitted it to herself. Her best chances were over, and it was, indeed, already more than doubtful whether she would ever marry at all. Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths groaned inwardly at the thought. Her daughter's continual presence and indiscriminating admiration were

to her an incessant gêne and weariness. She longed for the freedom, the enlarged income, that she would enjoy could she but once free herself of this burden.

Months passed. The Farringdon Griffiths had long returned to the quiet routine of their country home life. But its tranquillity was disturbed. Two fresh elements had entered into it: elements destined to change the whole course of events.

One of these was the recollection Virginia ever cherished within her breast of the bearded Scotchman. His distinct personality, his peculiar speech, his huge unpolished gentleness, so to speak, had all made a vivid impression on the meek little woman, so accustomed to being ignored. Day and night the image of Mr. Gordon was present with her. His little card became her most precious possession. The flowers she had worn on that Sunday evening, carefully dried within the leaves of her prayer-book, constituted the tenderest link.

Not long after Christmas an elaborate card was forwarded to her from the Bär. It did not take much penetration to identify the handwriting of the address with that which had scribbled the direction in the corner of Mr. Gordon's card. This fact caused Virginia to realise, with a painful sensation about the heart, that her admirer was evidently quite ignorant of her whereabouts. She debated long and anxiously with herself whether she should bring her home-address before him by a note in which she should thank him for his remembrance of her; but deciding mentally that this might be interpreted as forward on her part, she gave herself over instead to the undivided worship and care of the Christmas remembrance.

The other element which disturbed and agitated the whole home atmosphere was Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths' increasing deafness.

At first she had bravely ignored all symptoms of the affliction. She had a slight cold, which affected her hearing. Virginia mumbled insufferably and must really have to raise her voice above a whisper. But at last the fact had to be recognised and faced. Though Virginia and the automatic maid-of-all-work might combine to conceal anything unpleasant from their mutual task-mistress, it was not to be expected that her friends would give themselves the same trouble.

There came a day in early spring when, the Vicar's wife having paid her weekly call, Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths and Virginia sat alone together over the fire in their little drawing-room, and the elder lady set herself resolutely to talk the matter over with her daughter.

As might have been anticipated, Virginia had to bear a torrent of reproaches and reproofs for having so long concealed the fact from her mother. Then, when Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths had somewhat relieved herself by this outburst, she complainingly enquired what was to be done, since it was quite impossible for her to afford the best advice and a course of treatment, as recommended by the Vicar's lady.

It was then that Virginia, with many tears and prayers for forgiveness, confided to her mother the gist of the conversation which she, so long ago, had held with Mr. Gordon. To her unspeakable surprise, instead of receiving the severe reprimand she felt she well merited for having discussed her mother's infirmity with a stranger, Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths rose to her feet with a cry of gladness.

"To think of it, Virginia! Upon my word, you are the greatest fool alive. All this time, and I wondering how on earth you would ever get hold of him again! Why, I now see in my affliction the very way Providence has been preparing for your happiness. To have an aurist in love with you, and your mother growing stone-deaf before your eyes, and never to put the two together! Really, if it was not that I am well acquainted with your wonderful stupidity, I should think you had been prompted by sheer maliciousness. Now there is no need of crying; it only makes you look plain. We will go up to town to-morrow."

And to town they went the next day. Virginia, indeed, had meekly suggested that they should warn Mr. Gordon of their purpose by a letter. But Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths would hear of no more delays. She lent Virginia for the occasion a very juvenile bonnet of her own, and showed much motherly interest in her appearance. She allowed the use of no rouge, alleging that Virginia's pale cheeks were more natural and more interesting under the circumstances than the most becoming rose colour. With her own well-practised hand she delicately shaded to a cunning darkness the hollows that time had worn under her daughter's eyes.

It was with a beating heart that next day, about luncheon time, when they would be certain to find a doctor at home, Virginia sat perched up beside her mother on the high hard seat of a four-wheeler. Presently the cab turned out of the more crowded thoroughfares, and traversed certain well-known squares, and at last Virginia's eager eye caught the direction, Sefton Gardens, written up at the end of a row of handsome porticoed houses.

The cabman drew up with a jerk. A carriage and pair was blocking the way; a turn-out very creditable to Mr. Gordon's reputation as a physician, as Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths remarked with satisfaction. The carriage moved on, and the cab-horse, with a vicious little spurt, landed them at the bottom of the flight of steps.

The hall door was thrown open before the driver had time to get down from his seat, and a young man-servant in plain clothes, leaving an elder one in charge of the door, ran down the steps and helped the ladies to alight. The elder servant, with an air of sad attention, responded in the affirmative to Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths' enquiry for Mr. Gordon, and led them across a softly carpeted hall to a waiting-room.

To Virginia it was as though she were in a dream.

As she crossed the hall, the dim light shed by the coloured glass,

the tall palms and ferns, and the faintly discernible outlines of engravings in massive old-fashioned frames, crowded a wholly new set of impressions upon her narrow intellect. A beautiful fernery opened out of the waiting-room, and the æsthetically-toned furniture of the room itself, the piles of books and periodicals on the tables, the perfect set of photographs of Roman statues and remains on the walls, and the strong odour of the lilies and hyacinths that stood about in quaint bronze and china pots, all served still more to confuse her senses.

Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths, however, bustled about the room in active valuation of its contents.

"The carpet alone must have stood him in £50," she announced. "And the curtains! I never saw anything like them. The man must be perfectly rolling in riches. 'Pon my word, Virginia; but you have done well for yourself at last."

There was a sound of the hall door opening and closing, and then the grave man-servant appeared once more and bore away Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths' card on a massive silver salver.

"This way, madam."

Virginia obediently followed her mother; she felt faint and sick, and would fain have remained behind cowering in the recesses of one of the great velvet chairs.

They had recrossed the hall. A door at the further end was thrown open. They stood in a large, light room, and before them was Mr. Gordon. That was all that Virginia saw.

But Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths' bodily eye in a moment had transferred to her mental vision the whole insupportable situation. The wide, almost bare room, with its Persian carpet and Morris wall-paper undisturbed but for a few choice prints; the couple of Chippendale cabinets, the long low divan. And last, but not least, smallest but most prominent piece of furniture in the whole apartment, set in the window, surrounded by a net-work of wheels, was the unmistakable velvet upholstered chair of the dentist, with its considerate head-rest, its historical white crocheted antimacassar, its horrible machinery for elevation and depression.

She stood motionless, gazing.

Virginia had advanced, holding out her narrow gloved hand. But something in her mother's attitude struck her, and she, too, stood still. Her eye slowly followed her mother's round the room, and at last rested also on the chair. There was an awful pause, and then, with a faintness at the heart, she sank in a heap on the divan.

Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths' voice broke the stillness that followed. In her self-control and command of the circumstances there was something little short of heroic.

"I hear that you have a theory that deafness is often connected with the teeth," she said, in a metallic voice; "and I have come to ask your advice. I am becoming very deaf," she added, with

an heroic indifference to her own feelings, "and I am in hopes that it may be prevented at least from increasing."

Mr. Gordon's glad smile of welcome had long ago faded; his outstretched hand had fallen to his side. He bowed gravely in answer to Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths' speech.

"May I trouble you to sit down?" he said, in his slow Scotch tones.

Mr. Gordon, for the time engrossed by the exercise of his own pet fad, submitted Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths to a prolonged and careful examination. Her teeth were in a deplorable condition, he pronounced steadily. She was quite right in supposing that her deafness was in great part attributable to them. With her permission he would there and then prepare to set matters right.

Her permission was readily granted, for Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths had a keen regard for her own interest. Though she had no intention of receiving the dentist as an equal, she thought she might at least profit by his acquaintance to the extent of having a tiresome and expensive operation skilfully performed for nothing.

When, at last, Mr. Gordon announced that it was impossible for him to do anything that day as he had another engagement, the patient's usual savoir-faire had in great measure returned to her. She prepared to rise somewhat stiffly and acknowledge her indebtedness to Mr. Gordon; at the same time turning on Virginia a warning look, not knowing how much further that most foolish person might involve her.

Before Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths could thoroughly raise herself from her rather difficult position to carry out her meditated policy, Mr. Gordon had already hastened to the divan. He was bending over the reclining form, and turned his serious face on Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths.

"Your daughter has fainted," he said quietly. "Just bring me that glass of water."

"Parcel o' nonsense!" cried Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths energetically. "I'll soon bring her round." And she roughly shook the prostrate figure by the arm. "Get up at once, Virginia," she said, angrily; "and don't lie there making an exhibition of yourself."

But Virginia did not move. Her fair eyelashes lay stiffly on her cheeks; all sign of colour had left even her lips.

"Get me that glass of water," the dentist repeated. He had raised the languid head and removed the bonnet. This time Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths obeyed.

"It is atrocious," she murmured nervously; "positively atrocious, the way that girl involves me in a perfect scandal!"

Mr. Gordon gently dropped some of the cold water on Virginia's forehead, and put the glass to her lips. Her eyelids slightly quivered and her lips moved. He prepared to withdraw his arm.

"No, don't leave me," she murmured.

"Yes, yes! Take your arm away at once!" cried Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths vehemently. "Virginia, get up and come with me immediately! Mr. Gordon, I order you to let my daughter go."

Virginia opened her eyes wide, and with a terrified look at her mother, clung appealingly to the dentist's arm.

"Oh, don't send me away! Don't let me go yet!" she implored.

"She is not fit to go out again at present," Mr. Gordon said decisively. And without further parley he lifted the unresisting form in his arms, and conveying her into an adjoining room, deposited his light burden carefully on a sofa. Then he brought her wine, which he made her drink, and eau de Cologne with which he bathed her head, while Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths stood helplessly by.

"What does all this mean?" she demanded angrily at last, as Virginia began to sit up and smile feebly into the dentist's face.

"It means," said Mr. Gordon soberly, "that I love your daughter, and would like her to be my wife."

For a moment Mrs. Farringdon Griffiths felt staggered—crushed. That her daughter—and she a Farringdon, of Farringdon Hall—should marry a dentist: that a dentist should be her son-in-law! Then the quick eyes fell on the display of silver that stood along the carved oak sideboard, on the evidences of wealth and comfort all around; and in that glance her resolution received its death-blow. After all, what did it matter to her? This was probably Virginia's only chance, and she—she would be free. She looked down coldly on her daughter, who was gazing up at her with pitiably anxious eyes.

"Virginia is of age; she must judge for herself," she replied coldly. "If her happiness is at stake, I will not oppose her."

And Virginia, all tear-stained, without her curls, but with a new enraptured look shining on her face, turned to Mr. Gordon, and there and then plighted her troth to him.

A SURPRISE.

I ONLY said, "A good New Year!"
  And never guessed what he intended;
When he came up so shy and queer,
  I only said, "A good New Year!"
He took my hands and drew me near,
  And said it all on me depended:
I only said, "A good New Year!"
  Nor dreamt that I was his intended.

T. S.

J. SWAIN.

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER IV.

IN ESSEX STREET.

HENRY BRIGHTMAN'S offices were in Essex Street, Strand, near the Temple. He rented the whole house: a capital house, towards the bottom of the street on the left-hand side as you go down. His father, who had been head and chief of the firm, had lived in it. But old Mr. Brightman was dead, and his son, now sole master, lived over the water on the Surrey side, in a style his father would never have dreamt of. It was a firm of repute and consideration; and few legal firms, if any, in London were better regarded.

It was to this gentleman my uncle, Mr. Serjeant Stillingfar, articled me: and a gentleman Henry Brightman was in every sense of the term. He was a slender man of middle height, with a bright, pleasant face, quick, dark eyes, and brown hair. Very much to my surprise, I found, when arrangements were being made for me, that I was to live in the house. Serjeant Stillingfar had made it a condition that I should do so. He and the late Mr. Brightman had been firm friends, and his friendship was continued to Henry. An old lady, one Miss Methold, a cousin of the Brightmans, resided in the house, and I was to take up my abode with her. She was a kind old thing, though a little stern and reserved, and she made me very comfortable.

There were several clerks; and one articled pupil, who was leaving the house as I entered it. The head of all was a gentleman named Lennard, who seemed to take all management upon himself, under Mr. Brightman. George Lennard was a tall spare man, with a thin, fair, aristocratic face and well-formed features. He looked about thirty-five years old, and an impression prevailed in the office that he was well-born, well-connected, and had come down in the world through loss of fortune. A man of few words, attentive

and always at his post, Lennard was an excellent superintendent, ruling with a strict yet kindly hand.

One day, some weeks after I had entered, as I was at dinner with Miss Methold in her sitting-room, and the weather was warm enough for all doors to be open, we heard horses and carriage-wheels dash up to the house. The room was at the head of the stairs, leading from the offices to the kitchen: a large, pleasant room with a window looking towards the Temple chambers and the winding river.

"What a commotion!" exclaimed Miss Methold.

I went to the door, and saw an open barouche, with a lady and a little girl inside it, attended by a coachman and footman in livery.

"It is quite a grand carriage, Miss Methold."

"Oh," said she, looking over my shoulder: "it is Mrs. Brightman."

"Very proud and high and mighty, is she not?" I rejoined, for the clerks had talked about her.

"She was born proud. Her mother was a nobleman's daughter, and she'll be proud to the end," said the old lady. "Henry keeps up great show and state for her. Of course, that is his affair, not mine."

"I hear he has a charming place at Clapham, Miss Methold?"

"So do I," she answered rather bitterly. "I have never seen it."

"Never seen it?" I echoed in surprise.

"Never," she answered. "I have not even been invited there by her. Never once, Charles. Mrs. Brightman despises her husband's profession in her heart; she despises me as belonging to it, I suppose, and as a poor relation. She has never condescended to get out of her carriage to enter the office here, and has never asked to see me, here or there. Henry has invited me down there once or twice when she was away from home, but I have said, No thank you."

Mr. Lennard came in. The clerks, one excepted, had gone out to dinner. "Do you know whether it will be long before Mr. Brightman comes in, or where he has gone to?" he said to Miss Methold.

"Indeed, I do not," she answered rather shortly. "I only knew he was out by his not appearing now at luncheon."

"Charles, go to the carriage and tell Mrs. Brightman that we don't know how long it may be before Mr. Brightman comes in," said he.

I rather wondered why he could not go himself as I took out the message to Mrs. Brightman.

She had a fair proud face, and her air was cold and haughty as she listened to me.

"Let this be given to him as soon as he comes in," she said, handing me a sealed note. "Regent Street; Carbonell's," she added to the footman.

As the carriage turned and bowled away, I caught the child's pretty face, a smile on her rosy lips and in her laughing brown eyes.

I may as well say here that young Lake had struck up an

acquaintanceship with me. The reader may remember that I saw him at the chambers of Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar. I grew to like him greatly. His faults were all on the surface; his heart was in the right place. Boy though he was, he was thrown upon himself in the world. I don't mean as to money, but as to a home; and he steered his course unscathed through its shoals. The few friends he had, lived in the country. He had neither father nor mother. His lodgings were in Norfolk Street, very near to us. Miss Methold would sometimes have him in to spend Sunday with me; and now and then, but very rarely, he and I were invited for that day to dine with Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar.

The Sergeant lived in Russell Square, in one of its handsomest houses. But he kept, so to say, no establishment; just two or three servants and a modest little brougham. He must have been making a great deal of money at that time, and I suppose he put it by.

"Ah! you don't know, Charley," Lake said to me one evening when I was in Norfolk Street, and we began talking of him. "It is said his money went in that same precious bank which devoured yours; and it is thought that he lives in this quiet manner, eschewing pomps and vanities, to be able to help friends who were quite ruined by it. Old Jones knows a little, and I've heard him drop a word or two."

"I am sure my uncle is singularly good and kind. Those simple-minded men generally are."

Lake nodded. "Few men, *I* should say, come up to Sergeant Stillingfar."

A trouble had come to me in the early spring. I thought it a great one, and grieved over it. Major Carlen gave up his house in Gloucester Place, letting it furnished for a long term, and went abroad with his wife. *He* might have gone to the end of the world for ever and a day, but she was like my second mother, and indeed *was* so, and I felt lost without her. They took up their abode at Brussels. It would be good for Blanche's education, Mrs. Carlen wrote to me. Other people said that the Major had considerably out-run the constable, and went there to economise. Tom Heriot was down at Portsmouth with his regiment.

I think that is all I need say of this part of my life. I liked my profession very much indeed, and got on well in it and with Mr. Brightman and the clerks, and with good old Miss Methold. And so the years passed on.

The first change came when I was close upon twenty years of age: came in the death of Miss Methold. After that, I left Essex Street as a residence, for there was no longer anyone to rule it, and went into Lake's lodgings in Norfolk Street, sharing his sitting-room and securing a bed-room. And still a little more time rolled on.

It was Easter-tide. On Easter Eve, it happened that I had re-

mained in the office after the other clerks had left, to finish some work in hand. In these days Saturday afternoon has become a general holiday; in those days we had to work all the harder. On Saturdays a holiday was unknown.

Writing steadily, I finished my task, and was locking up my desk, which stood near the far window in the front room on the ground floor, when Mr. Brightman, who had also remained late, came downstairs from his private room, and looked in.

"Not gone yet, Charley!"

"I am going now, sir. I have only just finished my work."

"Some of the clerks are coming on Monday, I believe," continued Mr. Brightman. "Are you one of them?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Lennard told me I might take holiday, but I did not care about it. As I have no friends to spend it with, it would not be much of a holiday to me. Arthur Lake is out of town."

"And Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar on circuit," added Mr. Brightman.

He paused and looked at me, as he stood with the door in his hand. I was gathering the pens together.

"Have you no friends to dine with, to-morrow—Easter Day?"

"No, sir. At least I have not been asked anywhere. I think I shall go for a blow up the river."

"A blow up the river!" he repeated doubtfully. "Don't you go to church?"

"Always. I go to the Temple. I meant in the afternoon, sir."

"Well, if you have no friends to dine with, you may come and dine with me," said Mr. Brightman, after a moment's consideration. "Come down when service is over. You will find an omnibus at Charing Cross."

The invitation pleased me. Some of the clerks would have given their ears for it. Of course I mean the gentlemen clerks; not one of whom had ever been so favoured. I had sometimes wondered that he never asked me, considering his intimacy with my uncle. But, I suppose, to have invited me to his house and left out Miss Methold, would have been rather too pointed a slight upon her.

It was a fine day. The Temple service was beautiful, as usual; the anthem, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Afterwards I went forth to keep my engagement, and in due time reached the entrance gates of Mr. Brightman's residence.

It was a large, handsome villa, enclosed in fine pleasure-grounds, near Clapham. They lived in a good deal of style, kept seven or eight servants and two carriages; a large barouche, and a brougham in which he sometimes came to town. A well-appointed house, full of comfort and luxury. Mr. Brightman was on the lawn when I reached it.

"Well, Charles! I began to think you were late."

"I walked down, sir. The first two omnibuses were full, and I would not wait for a third."

"Rather a long walk," he remarked with a smile. "But it is what I should have done at your age. Dinner will be ready soon. We dine at three o'clock on Sundays. It allows ourselves and the servants to attend evening as well as morning service."

He had walked towards the house as he spoke, and we went in. The drawing-room and dining-room opened on either side a large hall. In the former room sat Mrs. Brightman. I had seen her occasionally at the office door in her carriage, but had never spoken to her except that first time. She was considerably younger than Mr. Brightman, who must have been then getting towards fifty. A proud woman she looked as she sat there; her hair light and silky, her blue eyes disdainful, her dress a rich purple silk, with fine white lace about it.

"Here is Charles Strange at last," Mr. Brightman said to her, and she replied by a slight bend of the head. She did not offer to shake hands with me.

"I have heard of you as living in Essex Street," she condescended to observe, as I sat down. "Your relatives do not, I presume, live in London?"

"I have not any near relatives," was my answer. "My great uncle lives in London, but he is away just now."

"You were speaking of that great civil cause, Emma, lately tried in the country; and of the ability of the defendants' counsel, Sergeant Stillingfar," put in Mr. Brightman. "It is Sergeant Stillingfar, if you remember, who is Charles's uncle."

"Oh, indeed," she said; and I thought her manner became rather more gracious. And ah, what a gracious, charming lady she could be when she pleased! When she was amongst people whom she considered to be of her own rank and degree.

"Where is Annabel?" asked Mr. Brightman.

"She has gone dancing off somewhere," was Mrs. Brightman's reply. "I never saw such a child. She is never five minutes together in one place."

Presently she danced in. A graceful, pretty child, apparently about twelve, in a light-blue silk frock. She wore her soft brown hair in curls round her head, and they flew about as she flew, and a bright colour rose to her cheeks with every word she spoke, and her eyes were like her father's—dark, tender, expressive. Not any resemblance could I trace to her mother, unless it lay in the same delicately-formed features.

We had a plain dinner; a quarter of lamb, pastry and creams. Mr. Brightman did not exactly apologise for it, but explained that on Sundays they had as little cooking as possible. But it was handsomely served, and there were several sorts of wine. Three servants waited at table, two in livery and the butler in plain clothes.

Some little time after it was over, Mr. Brightman left the room, and Mrs. Brightman, without the least ceremony, leaned back in an

easy chair and closed her eyes. I said something to the child. She did not answer, but came to me on tiptoe.

"If we talk, mamma will be angry," she whispered. "She never lets me make a noise while she goes to sleep. Would you like to come out on the lawn? We may talk there."

I nodded, and Annabel silently opened and passed out at one of the French windows, holding it back for me. I as silently closed it.

"Take care that it is quite shut," she said, "or the draught may get to mamma. Papa has gone to his room to smoke his cigar," she continued; "and we shall have coffee when mamma awakes. We do not take tea until after church. Shall you go to church with us?"

"I dare say I shall. Do you go?"

"Of course I do. My governess tells me never to miss attending church twice on Sundays, unless there is very good cause for doing so, and then things will go well with me in the week. But if I wished to stay at home, papa would not let me. Once, do you know, I made an excuse to stay away from morning service: I said my head ached badly, though it did not. It was to read a book that had been lent me, the 'Old English Baron.' I feared my governess would not let me read it, if she saw it, because it was about ghosts, so that I had only the Sunday to read it in. Well, do you know, that next week nothing went right with me: my lessons were turned back, my drawing was spoilt, and my French mistress tore my translation in two. Oh, dear! it was nothing but scolding and crossness. So at last, on the Saturday, I burst into tears and told Miss Shelley about staying away from church and the false excuse I had made. But she was very kind, and would not punish me, for she said I had already had a whole week of punishment."

Of all the little chatterboxes! "Is Miss Shelley your governess now?" I asked her.

"Yes. But her mother is an invalid, so mamma allows her to go home every Saturday night and come back on Monday morning. Mamma says it is pleasant to have Sunday to ourselves. But I like Miss Shelley very much, and should be dull without her if papa were not at home. I do love Sundays, because papa's here. Did you ever read 'The Old English Baron?'"

"No."

"Shall I lend it you to take home?" continued Annabel, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling with good-nature. "I have it for my own now. It is a very nice book. Have your sisters read it? Perhaps you have no sisters?"

"I have no real sisters, and my father and mother are dead. I have——"

"Oh, dear, how sad!" interrupted Annabel, clasping her hands. "Not to have a father and mother! Was it"—after a pause—"you who lived with Miss Methold?"

"Yes. Did you know her?"

"I knew her; and I liked her—oh, very much. Papa used to take me to see her sometimes. With whom do you live now?"

"I live in lodgings."

She stood looking at me with her earnest eyes—thoughtful eyes just then.

"Then who sews the buttons on your shirts?"

I burst into laughter: the reader may have done the same. "My landlady professes to sew them on, Annabel, but the shirts often go without buttons. Sometimes I sew one on myself."

"If you had one off now, and it was not Sunday, I would sew it on for you," said Annabel. "Why do you laugh?"

"At your concern about my domestic affairs, my dear little girl."

"But there's a gentleman who lives in lodgings and comes here sometimes to dine with papa—he is older than you—and he says it is the worst trouble of life to have no one to sew his buttons on. Who takes care of you if you are ill?" she added, after another pause.

"As there is no one to take care of me, I cannot afford to be ill, Annabel. I am generally quite well."

"I am glad of that. Was your father a lawyer, like papa?"

"No. He was a clergyman."

"Oh, don't turn," she cried; "I want to show you my birds. We have an aviary, and they are beautiful. Papa lets me call them mine; and some of them are mine in reality, for they were bought for me. Mamma does not care for birds."

Presently I asked Annabel her age.

"Fourteen."

"Fourteen!" I exclaimed in surprise.

"I was fourteen in January. Mamma says I ought not to tell people my age for they will only think me more childish; but papa says I may tell everyone."

She was in truth a child for her years; especially as age is now considered. She ran about, showing me everything, her frock, her curls, her eyes dancing: from the aviary to the fowls, from the fowls to the flowers: all innocent objects of her daily pleasures, innocent and guileless as she herself.

A smart-looking maid, with red ringlets flowing about her red cheeks, and wide cap-strings flowing behind them, came up.

"Why, here you are!" she exclaimed. "I've been looking all about for you, Miss Annabel. Your mamma says you are to come in."

"We are coming, Hatch; we were turning at that moment," answered the child. "Is coffee ready?"

"Yes, Miss Annabel, and waiting."

In the evening we went to church; ourselves, and the servants following at some distance. Afterwards we had tea, and then I rose to depart. Mr. Brightman walked with me across the lawn, and we had almost reached the iron gates when there came a sound of swift steps behind us.

"Papa! papa! Is he gone? Is Mr. Strange gone?"

"What is the matter now?" asked Mr. Brightman.

"I promised to lend Mr. Strange this: it is 'The Old English Baron.' He has never read it."

"There, run back," said Mr. Brightman, as I turned and took the book from her. "You will catch cold, Annabel."

"What a charming child she is, sir!" I could not help exclaiming.

"She is that," he replied. "A true child of nature, knowing no harm and thinking none. Mrs. Brightman complains that her ideas and manners are unformed; no style about her, she says, no reserve. In my opinion that ought to constitute a child's chief charm. All Annabel's parts are good. Of sense, intellect, talent, she possesses her full share; and I am thankful that they are not prematurely developed. I am thankful," he repeated with emphasis, "that she is not a forward child. In my young days, girls were girls, but now there is not such a thing to be found. They are all women. I do not admire the forcing system myself; forced vegetables, forced fruit, forced children: they are good for little. A genuine child, such as Annabel, is a treasure rarely met with."

I thought so too.

CHAPTER V.

WATTS'S WIFE.

Leaving the omnibus at Charing Cross, I was hastening along the Strand on my way home, when I ran against a gentleman, who was swaggering along in a handsome, capacious cloak as if all the street belonged to him.

"I beg your pardon," I said, in apology. "I ——" And there I broke off to stare, for I thought I recognised him in the gas-light.

"Why! It is Major Carlen!"

"Just so. And it is Charles. How are you, Charles?"

"Have you lately come from Brussels?" I asked, as we shook hands. "And how did you leave mamma and Blanche?"

"They are in Gloucester Place," he answered. "We all came over last Wednesday."

"I wonder they did not let me know it."

"Plenty of time, young man. They will not be going away in a hurry. We are settling down here again. You can come up when you like."

"That will be to-morrow then. Good-night, sir."

But it was not until Monday evening that I could get away. Mr. Lennard went out in the afternoon on some private matter of his own, and desired me to remain in to see a client, who had sent us word he should call, although it was Easter Monday. Mr. Brightman did not come to town that day.

Six o'clock was striking when I reached Gloucester Place. Blanche

ran to meet me in the passage, and we had a spell of kissing. I think she was then about fourteen; perhaps fifteen. A fair, upright, beautiful girl, with the haughty blue eyes of her childhood, and a shower of golden curls.

"Oh, Charley, I am so glad! I thought you were never, never coming to us."

"I did not know you were here until last night. You should have sent me word."

"I told mamma so; but she was not well. She is not well yet. The journey tired her, you see, and the sea was rough. Come upstairs and see her, Charley. Papa has just gone out."

Mrs. Carlen sat over the fire in the drawing-room in an easy chair, a shawl upon her shoulders. It was a dull evening, twilight not far off, and she sat with her back to the light. It struck me she looked thin and ill. I had been over once or twice to stay with them in Brussels; the last time, eighteen months ago.

"Are you well, mamma?" I asked as she kissed me—for I had not left off calling her by the fond old childhood's name. "You don't look so."

"The journey tired me, Charley," she answered—just as Blanche had said to me. "I have a little cold, too. Sit down, my boy."

"Have you come back here for good?" I asked.

"Well yes, I suppose so," she replied with hesitation. "For the present, at all events."

Tea was brought in. Blanche made it; her mother kept to her chair and her shawl. The more I looked at her, the greater grew the conviction that something beyond common ailed her. Major Carlen was dining out, and they had dined in the middle of the day.

Alas! I soon knew what was wrong. After tea, contriving to get rid of Blanche for a few minutes on some plausible excuse, she told me all. An inward complaint was manifesting itself, and it was hard to say how it might terminate. The Belgian doctors had not been very reassuring upon the point. On the morrow she was going to consult James Paget.

"Does Blanche know?" I asked.

"Not yet. I must see Mr. Paget before saying anything to her. If my own fears are confirmed, I shall tell her. In that case I shall lose no time in placing her at school."

"At school!"

"Why yes, Charley. What else can be done? This will be no home for her when I am out of it. Not at an ordinary school, though. I shall send her to our old home, White Littleham Rectory. Mr. and Mrs. Ravensworth are there still. She takes two or three pupils to bring up with her own daughter and will be glad of Blanche. There—we will put that subject away for the present, Charley. I want to ask you about something else, and Blanche will soon be back again. Do you see much of Tom Heriot?"

"I see him very rarely indeed. He is not quartered in London, you know."

"Charles, I am afraid—I am very much afraid that Tom is wild," she went on, after a pause. "He came into his money last year: six thousand pounds. We hear that he has been launching out into all sorts of extravagance ever since. That must mean that he is drawing on his capital."

I had heard a little about Tom's doings myself. At least, Lake had done so, which came to the same thing. But I did not say this.

"It distresses me much, Charles. You know how careless and improvident Tom is, and yet how generous-hearted. He will bring himself to ruin if he does not mind, and what would become of him then? Major Carlen says—— Hush! here comes Blanche."

I cannot linger over this part of my story. Mrs. Carlen died; and Blanche was sent to White Littleham.

And, indeed, of the next few passing years there is not much to record. I obtained my certificate, as a matter of course. Then I managed, by Mr. Brightman's kindness in sparing me, and by my uncle's liberality, to keep a few terms at Oxford. I was twenty-three when I kept the last term, and then I was sent for some months to Paris, to make myself acquainted with law, as administered in the French courts. That over, arrangements were made for my becoming Mr. Brightman's partner. If he had had sons, one of them would probably have filled the position. Having none, he admitted me on easy terms, for I had my brains about me, as the saying runs, and was excessively useful to the firm. A certain sum was paid down by Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar, and the firm became Brightman and Strange. I was to receive at first only a small portion of the profits. And let me say here, that all my expenses of every description, during these past years, had been provided for by that good man, Charles Stillingfar, and provided liberally. So there I was in an excellent position, settled for life when only twenty-four years of age.

After coming home from Paris to enter upon these new arrangements, I found Mr. Brightman had installed a certain James Watts in Essex Street, as care-taker and messenger, our former man, Dickory, having become old and feeble. A good change. Dickory, in growing old, had grown fretful and obstinate, and liked his own way and will better than that of his masters. Watts was well-mannered and well-spoken; a respectable and trustworthy man. His wife's duties were to keep the rooms clean, in which she was at liberty to have in a woman to help once or twice a week if she so minded, and up to the present time to prepare Mr. Brightman's daily luncheon. They lived in the rooms on the bottom floor, one of which was their bedroom.

"I like them both," I said to Mr. Brightman, when I had been back a day or two. "Things will be comfortable now."

"Yes, Charles; I hope you will find them so," he answered.

For it ought to be mentioned, that in becoming Mr. Brightman's partner, it had been settled that I should return as an inmate to the house. He said he should prefer it. And, indeed, I thought I should also. So that I had taken up my abode there at once.

The two rooms on the ground floor were occupied by the clerks. Mr. Lennard had his desk in the back one. Miss Methold's parlour, a few steps lower, was now not much used, except that a client was sometimes taken into it. The large front room on the first floor was Mr. Brightman's private room ; the back one was mine ; but he had also a desk in it. These two rooms opened to one another. The floor above this was wholly given over to me ; sitting-room, bed-room, and dressing-room. The top floor was only used for boxes, and on those rare occasions when someone wanted to sleep at the office. Watts and his wife were to attend to me ; she to see to the meals, he to wait upon me.

"I should let her get in everything without troubling, and bring up the bills weekly, were I you, Charles," remarked Mr. Brightman, one evening when he had stayed later than usual, and was in my room, and we fell to talking of the man and his wife. "Much better than for her to be coming to you everlastingly, saying you want this and you want that. She is honest, I feel sure, and I had the best of characters with both of them."

"She has an honest face," I answered. "But it looks sad. And what a silent woman she is. Speaking of her face though, sir, it puts me in mind of someone's, and I cannot think whose."

"You may have seen her somewhere or other," remarked Mr. Brightman.

"Yes, but I can't remember where. I'll ask her."

Mrs. Watts was then coming into the room with some water, which Mr. Brightman had rung for. She looked about forty-five years old ; a thin, bony woman of middle height, with a pale, grey, wrinkled face, and grey hairs banded under a huge cap, tied under her chin.

"There's something about your face that seems familiar to me, Mrs. Watts," I said, as she put down the glass and the bottle of water. "Have I ever seen you before ? "

She was pouring out the water, and did not look at me. "I can't say, sir," she answered in a low tone.

"Do you remember *me ?* That's the better question."

She shook her head. "Watts and I lived in Ely Place for some years before we came here, sir," she then said. "It's not impossible you may have seen me in the street when I was doing the steps ; but I never saw you pass by that I know of."

"And before that, where did you live ? "

"Before that, sir ? At Dover."

"Ah ! well," I said, for this did not help me out with my puzzle : "I suppose it is fancy."

Mr. Brightman caught up the last word as Mrs. Watts withdrew.

"Fancy, Charles; that's what it must be. And fancy sometimes plays wonderful tricks with us."

"Yes, sir; I expect it is fancy. For all that, I feel perplexed. The woman's voice and manner seem to strike a chord of my memory as much as her face does."

"Captain Heriot, sir."

Sitting one evening in my room at dusk in the summer weather, the window open to the opposite wall and to the side view of the Thames, waiting for Lake to come in, Watts had thus interrupted me to show in Tom Heriot. I started up and grasped his hands. He was a handsome young fellow, with the open manners that had charmed the world in the days gone by, and charmed it still.

"Charley, boy! It is good to see you."

"Ay, and to see *you*, Tom. Are you staying in London?"

"Why, we have been here for days! What a fellow you are, not to know that we are now quartered here. Don't you read the newspapers? It used to be said, you remember, that young Charley lived in a wood."

I laughed. "And how are things with you, Tom?"

"Rather down; have been for a long time; getting badder and badder."

My heart gave a thump. In spite of his laughing air and his bright smile, I feared it might be too true.

"I am going to the deuce, headlong, Charley."

"Don't, Tom!"

"Don't what? Not go or not talk of it? It is as sure as death, lad."

"Have you made holes in your money?"

"Fairly so. I think I may say so, considering that the whole of it is spent."

"Oh, Tom!"

"Every individual stiver. But upon my honour as a soldier, Charley, other people have had more of it than I. A lot of it went at once, when I came into it, paying off back debts."

"What shall you do? You will never make your pay suffice."

"Sell out, I expect."

"And then?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders in answer. They were very slender shoulders. His frame was slight altogether, suggesting an idea that he might not be strong. He was about as tall as I—rather above middle height.

"Take a clerkship with you, at twenty shillings a week, if you'd give it me. Or go out to the Australian diggings to pick up gold. How grave you look, Charles!"

"It is a grave subject. But I hope you are saying this in joke, Tom."

"Half in joke, half in earnest. I will not sell out if I can help it; be sure of that, old man; but I think it will have to come to it. Can you give me something to drink, Charley? I am thirsty."

"Will you take some tea? I am just going to have mine. Or anything else instead?"

"I was thinking of brandy and soda. But I don't mind if I do try tea, for once. Ay, I will. Have it up, Charley."

I rang the bell, and Mrs. Watts brought it up.

"Anything else, sir?" she stayed to ask.

"Not at present. Watts has gone out with that letter, I suppose? —— Why, you have forgotten the milk!"

She gave a sharp word at her own stupidity, and left the room. Tom's eyes had been fixed upon her, following her to the last. He began slowly pushing back his bright brown hair, as he would do in his boyhood when anything puzzled him.

"Oh, I remember," he suddenly exclaimed. "So you have *her* here, Charley!"

"Who here?"

"Leah."

"*Leah!* What do you mean?"

"That servant of yours."

"That is our messenger's wife: Mrs. Watts."

"Mrs. Watts she may be now, for aught I know; but she was Leah Williams when we were youngsters, Charley."

"Impossible, Tom. This old woman cannot be Leah."

"I tell you, lad, it is Leah," he persisted. "No mistake about it. At the first moment I did not recollect her. I have a good eye for faces, but she is wonderfully altered. Do you mean to say she has not made herself known to you?"

I shook my head. But even as Tom spoke, little items of remembrance that had worried my brain began to clear themselves, bit by bit. Mrs. Watts came in with the milk.

She had put it down on the tray when Tom walked up to her, holding out his hand, his countenance all smiles, his hazel eyes dancing.

"How are you, Leah, after all these years? Shake hands for auld lang syne. Do you sing the song still?"

Leah gave one startled glance and then threw her white apron up to her face with a sob.

"Come, come," said Tom kindly. "I didn't want to startle you, Leah."

"I didn't think you would know me, sir," she said, lifting her woe-begone face. "Mr. Charles here did not."

"Not know you! I should know you sooner than my best sweetheart," cried Tom gaily.

"Leah," I interposed, gravely turning to her, "how is it that you did not let me know who you were? Why have you kept it from me?"

She stood with her back against Mr. Brightman's desk, hot tears raining down her worn cheeks.

"I *couldn't* tell you, Master Charles. I'm sorry you know now. It's like a stab to me."

"But why could you not tell me?"

"Pride, I suppose," she shortly said. "I was upper servant at the Rectory; your mamma's own maid, Master Charles: and I couldn't bear you should know that I had come down to this. A servant of all work—scrubbing floors and washing dishes."

"Oh, that's nothing," struck in Tom cheerfully. "Most of us have our ups and downs, Leah. As far as I can foresee, I may be scouring out pots and pans at the gold-diggings next year. I have just been saying so to Mr. Charley. Your second marriage venture was an unlucky one, I expect?"

Leah was crying silently. "No, it is not that," she answered presently in a low tone. "Watts is a steady and respectable man; very much so; above me, if anything. It—it—I have had cares and crosses of my own, Mr. Tom; I have them always; and they keep me down."

"Well, tell me what they are," said Tom. "I may be able to help you. I will if I can."

Leah sighed and moved to the door. "You are just as kind-hearted as ever, Mr. Tom; I see that; and I thank you. Nobody can help me, sir. And my trouble is secret to myself: one I cannot speak of to anyone in the world."

Just as kind-hearted as ever! Yes, Tom Heriot was that, and always would be. Embarrassed as he no doubt was for money, he slipped a gold piece into Leah's hand as she left the room, whispering that it was for old friendship's sake.

And so that was Leah! Back again waiting upon me, as she had waited when I was a child. It was passing strange.

I spoke to her that night, and asked her to confide her trouble to me. The bare suggestion seemed to terrify her.

"It was a dreadful trouble," she admitted in answer; "a nightly and daily torment; one that at times went well-nigh to frighten her senses away. But she must keep it secret, though she died for it."

And as Leah whispered this to me under her breath, she cast dread glances around the walls on all sides, as if she feared that eavesdroppers might be there.

What on earth could the secret be?

And now, for a time, I retire into the background, and cease personally to tell the story.

CHAPTER VI.

BLANCHE HERIOT.

On one of those promising days that we now and then see in February, which seem all the more warm and lovely in contrast with the passing winter, the parsonage of White Littleham put on its gayest appearance within—perhaps in response to the fair face of nature without. A group of four girls had collected in the drawing-room. One was taking the brown holland covers from the chairs, sofa and footstools; another was bringing out certain ornaments, elegant trifles, displayed only on state occasions; the other two were filling glasses with evergreens and hot-house flowers. It was the same room in which you once saw poor Mrs. Strange lying on her road to death. The parsonage received three young ladies to share in the advantages of foreign governesses, provided for the education of its only daughter, Cecilia.

Whilst the girls were thus occupied, a middle-aged lady entered, the mistress of the house, and wife of the Reverend John Ravensworth.

"Oh, Mrs. Ravensworth, why did you come in? We did not want you to see it until it was all finished."

Mrs. Ravensworth smiled. "My dears, it will only look as it has looked many a time before; as it did at Christmas——"

"Mamma, you must excuse my interrupting you," cried the young girl who was arranging the ornaments; "but it will look very different from then. At Christmas we had wretched weather, and see it to-day. And at Christmas we had not the visitors we shall have now."

"We had one of the two visitors, at any rate, Cecilia."

"Oh, yes, we had Arnold. But Arnold is nobody; we are used to him."

"And Major Carlen is somebody," interposed the only beautiful girl present, looking round from the flowers with a laugh. "Thank you, in papa's name, Cecilia."

Very beautiful was she: exceedingly fair, with somewhat haughty blue eyes, delicate features, and fine golden hair. Blanche Heriot (as often as not called Blanche Carlen at the Rectory) stood conspicuous amidst the rest of the girls. They were pleasing-looking and lady-like, but that was all. Rather above middle-height, slender, graceful, she stood as a queen beside her companions. Under different auspices, Blanche Heriot might have become vain and worldly; but, enshrined, as she had been for the last few years, within the precincts of a humble parsonage, and trained in its doctrines of practical Christianity, Blanche had become thoroughly imbued with the influences around her. Now, in her twentieth year, she was simple and guileless as a child.

It was so long since she had seen her father—as she was pleased to call Major Carlen—that she had partly forgotten what he was like. He was expected now on a two days' visit, and for him the house was being made to look its best. The other visitor, coming by accident at the same time, was Arnold Ravensworth, the Rector's nephew.

Major Carlen's promised visit was an event to the quiet Rector and his wife. All they knew of him was that he was stepfather to Blanche, and a man who moved in the gay circles of the world. The interest of Blanche Heriot's money had paid for her education and dress. The Major would have liked the fingering of it amazingly; but to covet is one thing, to obtain is another. Blanche's money was safe in the hands of trustees; but before Mrs. Carlen died she had appointed her husband Blanche's personal guardian, with power to control her residence when she should have attained her eighteenth year. That had been passed some time now, and Major Carlen had just awakened to his responsibilities.

The first to arrive was Arnold Ravensworth, a distinguished-looking man, with a countenance, cold, it must be confessed, but full of intellect. And the next to arrive was not the Major. The day passed on to night. The trains came into the neighbouring station, but they did not bring Major Carlen. Blanche cried herself to sleep. She remembered how kind her papa used to be to her—indulging her and taking her about to see sights—and she had cherished a great affection for him. In fact, the Major had always indulged little Blanche.

Neither had he come the next morning. After breakfast, Blanche went to the end of the garden and stood looking out across the field. The shady dingle, where as a little child she had sat to pick violets and primroses, was there; but she was gazing at something else—the path that would bring her father. Arnold Ravensworth came strolling up behind her.

"You know the old saying, Blanche: a watched-for visitor never comes."

"Oh, dear, why do you depress me, Arnold? To watch is something. I shall cross the field and look up the road."

They started off in the sunshine. Blanche had a pretty straw hat on. She took the arm Mr. Ravensworth held out to her. Very soon, a stranger turned into the field and came swinging towards them.

"Blanche, is this the Major?"

It was a tall, large-limbed, angular man in an old blue cloak lined with scarlet. He had iron-grey hair and whiskers, grey, hard eyes, a large twisted nose, and very white teeth. Blanche laughed merrily.

"That papa! What an idea you must have of him, Arnold! Papa was a handsome man with black hair, and had lost two of his front teeth. They were knocked out, fighting with the Caffres."

The stranger came on, staring intently at the good-looking young

man and the beautiful girl on his arm. Mr. Ravensworth spoke in a low tone.

"Are you quite sure, Blanche? Black hair turns grey, remember; and he has a little travelling portmanteau under that cloak."

Even as he spoke, something in the stranger's face struck upon Blanche Heriot's memory. She disengaged herself and approached him, too agitated to weigh her words.

"Oh—I beg your pardon—are you not papa?"

Major Carlen looked at her closely. "Are you Blanche?"

"Yes, I am Blanche. Oh, papa!"

The Major tucked his step-daughter under his own arm; and Mr. Ravensworth went on to give notice of the arrival.

"Papa, I never saw anyone so much altered!"

"Nor I," interposed the Major. "I was wondering what deuced handsome girl was strolling towards me. You are beautiful, Blanche; more so than your mother was, and she was handsome."

Blanche, confused though she felt at the compliment, could not return it.

"Who is that young fellow?" resumed the Major.

"Arnold Ravensworth; Mr. Ravensworth's nephew. He lives in London, and came down yesterday for a short visit."

"Oh. Does he come often?"

"Pretty often. We wish it was oftener. We like him to be here."

"He seems presuming."

"Dear papa! Presuming! He is not at all so. And he is very talented and clever. He took honours at Oxford, and ——"

"I see," interrupted Major Carlen, displaying his large and regular teeth—a habit of his when not pleased. He had rapidly taken up an idea, and it angered him. "Is this the parson, Blanche? He looks very sanctimonious."

"Oh, papa!" she returned, feeling ready to cry at his contemptuous tone. "He is the best man that ever lived. Everyone loves and respects him."

"Hope it's merited, my dear," concluded the Major, as he met the hand of the Reverend John Ravensworth.

Ere middle-day, the Major had scattered a small bombshell through the parsonage by announcing that he had come to take his daughter away. Blanche felt it bitterly. It was her home, and a happy one. To exchange it for the Major's did not look now an inviting prospect. Though she would not acknowledge it to her own heart, she was beginning to regard him with more awe than love. That the resolution must have been suddenly formed she knew, for he had not come down with any intention of removing her.

"Papa, my things can never be ready," was her last forlorn argument, when others had failed.

"Things?" said the Major. "Trunks, and clothes, and rattle-traps? They can be sent after you, Blanche."

"I have a bird," cried Blanche, her eyes filling. "There it is, in the cage."

"Leave it as a souvenir to the Rectory. Blanche, don't be a child. I have pictured you as one hitherto, but now that I see you I find my mistake. You must be thinking of other things, my dear."

And thus Blanche Heriot was hurried away. All the parsonage escorted her to the station, the girls in tears, and she almost heart-broken.

Of late years Major Carlen had been almost always in debt and difficulty. His property was mortgaged. His only certainty was his half-pay; but he was lucky at cards, and often luckier at betting. He retained his club and his visiting connection, and dined out three parts of his time. Just now he was up in the world, having scored a prize on some winter racecourse, and he was back in his house in Gloucester Place. It had been let furnished for three years, portions of which time the Major had spent abroad.

"It will be very dull for me, papa," sighed Blanche, as they were whirling along in an express train. "I dare say you are out all day long, as you used to be."

"Not dull at all," said the Major. "You must make Mrs. Guy take you out and about."

"Mrs. Guy!" exclaimed Blanche, her blue eyes opening widely. "Is she in London?"

"Yes, and a fine old guy she is; more ridiculously nervous than ever," replied the Major. "She arrived unexpectedly from Jersey one evening last week, and quartered herself upon Gloucester Place, for an indefinite period no doubt. She did this once before, if you remember, in your poor mamma's time."

"She will be something in the way of company for me," said Blanche with another sigh.

"Aye! She is a stupid goose, but you'll be safer under her wing and mine than you would have been ruralising in the fields and the parsonage garden with that Arnold Ravensworth. I have eyes, Miss Blanche."

So had Blanche, especially just then; and they were wide open and fixed upon the Major.

"Doing what, papa?" cried she.

"I saw his drift: 'Blanche' this, and 'Blanche' the other, and his arm put out for you at every turn! No, no; I do not leave you there to be converted into Mrs. Arnold Ravensworth."

Blanche clasped her hands and broke into merry laughter. "Oh, papa, what an idea!—how could you imagine it? Why, he is going to marry Mary Stopford."

Major Carlen looked blank. Had he made all this inconvenient haste for nothing? "Who the deuce is Mary Stopford?"

"She lives in Devonshire. A pale, gentle girl with nice eyes: I have seen her picture. Arnold wears it to a little chain inside his

waistcoat. They are to be married in the autumn when the House is up. The very notion of my marrying Arnold Ravensworth!" broke off Blanche with another laugh. A laugh that was quite sufficient to prove the fact that she was heart-whole.

"The House!" repeated the Major. "Who is he then?"

"He is very well off as to fortune, and is—something. It has to do with the House, not as a Member, though he will be that soon, I believe. I think he is secretary to one of the Ministers. His father was the elder brother, and the Reverend John Ravensworth the younger. There is a very great difference in their positions. Arnold is well-off and said to be a rising man."

Every word increased Major Carlen's vexation. Even had his fear been correct, it seemed that the young man would not have been an undesirable match for Blanche, and he had saddled himself with her at a most inconvenient moment!

"Well, well," thought he; "she will soon make her mark, unless I am mistaken, and there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

Mrs. Guy, widow of the late Admiral Guy, vegetating for years past upon her slight income in Jersey, was Major Carlen's younger sister, and a smaller edition of himself. She had the same generally fair-featured face, with the twisted nose and the grey eyes; but while his eyes were hard and fierce, hers were soft and kindly. She was a well-meaning, but indescribably silly woman; and her nervous fears and fancies had so grown upon her that they were becoming a disease. Lying before the fire on a sofa in her bed-room, she received Blanche with a flood of tears, supplemented by several moans. The tears were caused by the pleased surprise; the moans at her having come home on a Friday, for that must surely betoken ill-luck. Blanche was irreverent enough to laugh.

Major Carlen still counted a few acquaintances of consideration in the social world, and Miss Heriot was introduced to them. Mrs. Guy was persuaded to forget her ailments temporarily, and to act as chaperon. The Major gave his sister a new dress and bonnet and a cap or two; and as she had not yet quite done with vanity (has a woman *ever* done with it?), she fell before the bribe.

He had been right in his opinion that Blanche's beauty would not fail to make its mark. So charming a girl, so lovely of face and graceful of form, so innocent of guile, had not been seen of late. Before the spring had greatly advanced, a Captain Cross made proposals for her to the Major. He was of excellent family, and offered fair settlements. The Major accepted him, not deeming it at all necessary to consult his daughter.

Blanche rebelled. "I don't care for him, papa," she objected.

The Major gave his nose a twist. He did not intend to have any trouble with Blanche, and would not allow her to begin it.

"Not care!" he exclaimed in surprise. "What does that matter?

Captain Cross is a fine man, stands six feet one, and you'll care for him in time."

"But, before I consent to marry him, I ought to know whether I shall like him or not."

"Blanche, you are a dunce! You have been smothered up in that parsonage till you know nothing. Do you suppose that in our class of society it is usual to fall in love, as the ploughboys and milkmaids do? People marry first, and grow accustomed to each other afterwards. Whatever you do, my dear, don't betray *gaucherie* of that kind."

Blanche Heriot doubted. She never supposed but that he whom she called father had her true interest at heart, and must be so acting. Mrs. Guy, too, unconsciously swayed her. A martyr to poverty herself, she believed that in marrying one so well-off as Captain Cross, a girl must enter upon the seventh heaven of happiness. Altogether, Blanche yielded; yielded against her inclination and her better judgment. She consented to marry Captain Cross, and preparations were begun.

Meanwhile, Arnold Ravensworth had been an occasional visitor at Major Carlen's, the Major making no sort of objection, now that circumstances were explained: indeed, he encouraged him there, and was especially cordial. Major Carlen had invariably one eye on the world and the other on self-interest, and it occurred to him that a rising man, as Arnold Ravensworth beyond doubt was, might prove useful to him in one way or another.

One evening, when it was yet only the beginning of April, Mr. Ravensworth called in Gloucester Place, and found the Major alone.

"Are Mrs. Guy and Blanche out?" he asked.

"They are upstairs with the dressmaker," replied the Major. "We sent to her to-day to spur on with Blanche's things, and she has come to-night for fresh orders."

"Is the marriage being hurried on, Major?"

"Time is creeping on, sir," was the gruff answer.

"Are they getting ahead with the settlements? When I saw you last week, you were in a way at the delay, and said lawyers had only been invented for one's torment."

"They got on, after that, and the deeds were ready, and waiting for signature. But I dropped them a note yesterday to say they might burn them, as so much waste paper," returned the Major.

"Burn the settlements!" echoed Mr. Ravensworth.

The Major's eyes, that could look pleasant on occasion, glinted at his astonishment. "Those settlements are being replaced by heavier ones," he said. "Blanche does not marry Captain Cross. It's off. A more eligible offer has been made her, and Cross is dismissed."

Mr. Ravensworth doubted whether he heard aright. Major Carlen resumed. "And she was making herself miserable over it. She cannot endure Cross."

"What a disappointment for Cross! What a mortification! Will he accept his dismissal?"

"He will be obliged to accept it," returned the Major, pulling up his shirt-collar, which was always high enough for two. "He has no other choice left to him. A man does not die for love now-a-days; or rush into an action for breach of promise, and become a laughing-stock at his club. Blanche marries Lord Level."

"Lord Level!" Mr. Ravensworth repeated in a curious accent.

"You look as though you doubted the information."

"I do not relish it, for your daughter's sake," replied Mr. Ravensworth. "She never can—can—like Lord Level."

"What's the matter with Lord Level? He may be approaching forty, but——"

Mr. Ravensworth laughed. "Not just yet, Major Carlen."

"Well, say he's thirty-four; thirty-three, if you like. Blanche, at twenty, needs guiding. And if he is not as rich as some peers, he is ten times richer than Cross. He met Blanche out, and came dangling here after her. I did not give a thought to it, for I did not look upon Level as a marrying man: he has been somewhat talked of in another line——"

"Yes," emphatically interrupted Mr. Ravensworth. "Well?"

"Well!" irritably returned the Major: "then there's so much the more credit due to him for settling down. When he found that Cross was really expecting to have Blanche, and that he might lose her altogether, he spoke up, and said he should like her himself."

"Does Blanche approve of the exchange?"

"She was rather inclined to kick at it," returned the Major, in his respectable phraseology, "and we had a few tears.—But if you ask questions in that sarcastic tone, sir, you don't deserve to be answered. Not that Blanche wanted to keep Cross; she acknowledged that she was only too thankful to be rid of him; but, about behaving dishonourably, as she called it. 'My dear,' said I, 'there's your absurd rusticity coming in again. You don't know the world. Such things are done in high life every day.' She believed me and was reconciled. You look black as a thunder-cloud, Ravensworth. What right have you to do so, pray?"

"None in the world. I beg your pardon. I was thinking of Blanche's happiness."

"You had better think of her good," retorted the Major. "She likes Level. I don't say she is yet in love with him: but she did not like Cross. Level is an attractive man, remember."

"Has been rather too much so," cynically retorted Mr. Ravensworth.

"Here she comes. I am going out; so you may offer your congratulations at leisure."

Major Carlen went away, and Blanche entered. She took her seat by the fire, and as Mr. Ravensworth gazed down upon her, a

feeling of deep regret and pity came over him. Shame! thought he, to sacrifice her to Level. For in truth that nobleman's name was not in the best odour, and Arnold Ravensworth was a man of strict notions.

It has been asserted that some natures possess an affinity the one for the other; are irresistibly drawn together in the repose of full and perfect confidence. It is a mysterious affinity, not born of *love*: and it may be experienced by two men or women who have outlived even the remembrance of the passion. Had Blanche Heriot been offered to Arnold Ravensworth, he would have declined her, for he loved another, and she had as much idea of loving the man in the moon as of loving him. Nevertheless, that never dying, unfathomable part of them, the spirit, was attracted, like finding like. Between such, there can be little reserve.

"What unexpected changes take place, Blanche!"

"Do not blame me," she replied, with a rising colour, her tone sinking to a whisper. "My father says it is right, and I obey him."

"I hope you like Lord Level?"

"Better than I liked someone else," was her answer, as she looked into the fire. "At first the—the change frightened me. It did not seem right, and it was so very sudden. But I am getting over that feeling now. Papa says he is very good."

Papa says he is very good! The old hypocrite of a Major! thought Mr. Ravensworth. But it was not his place to tell her that Lord Level had not been very good.

"Oh, Blanche!" he exclaimed, "I hope you will be happy! Is it to be soon?"

"Yes, they say so. As soon, I think, as the settlements can be ready. Papa sent to-day to hurry on my wedding things. Lord Level is going abroad immediately and wishes to take me with him."

"They say so!" was his mental repetition. "This poor child, brought up in the innocence of her simple country home, more childish, more tractable and obedient, more inexperienced than are those of less years, who have lived in the world, is as a puppet in their hands. But the awakening will come."

"You are going?" said Blanche, as he rose. "Will you not stay and take tea? Mrs. Guy will be down soon."

"Not this evening. Hark! here is the Major back again."

"I do not think it is papa's step," returned Blanche, bending her ear to listen.

It was not. As she spoke, the door was thrown open by the servant. "Lord Level."

Lord Level entered, and took the hand which Mr. Ravensworth released. Mr. Ravensworth looked full at the peer as he passed him: they were not acquainted. A handsome man, with a somewhat free expression—a countenance that Mr. Ravensworth took forthwith a prejudice against, perhaps unjustly. "Who's that, Blanche?" he heard him say as the servant closed the door.

Lord Level was a fine, powerful man, of good height and figure; his dark auburn hair was wavy and worn rather long, in accordance with the fashion of the day. His complexion was fair and fresh, and his features were good. Altogether he was what the Major had called him, an attractive man. Blanche Heriot had danced with him and he had danced with her; the one implies the other you will say; and a liking for one another had sprung up. It may not have been love on either side as yet—but that is uncertain.

"How lovely," exclaimed Blanche, as he held out to her a small bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley, and their sweet perfume caught her senses.

"I brought them for you," whispered Lord Level; and he bent his face nearer and took a silent kiss from her lips. It was the first time; and Blanche blushed consciously.

"You did not tell me who that was, Blanche."

"Arnold Ravensworth," she replied. "You have heard me speak of him."

"An ill-tempered looking man!"

"Do you think so? Well, yes, perhaps he did look cross to-night. He had been hearing about—about *us*—from papa; and I suppose it did not please him."

Archibald Baron Level drew himself up to his full height; his face assumed its haughtiest expression. "What business is it of his?" he asked. "Does he wish to aspire to you himself?"

"Oh, no, no; he is soon to be married. He is a man of strict honour, and I fear he thinks that papa—that I—that we have not behaved well to Captain Cross."

They were standing side by side on the hearth-rug, the fire-light playing on them and on Blanche's shrinking face. How miserably uncomfortable the subject of Captain Cross made her she could never tell.

"See here, Blanche," spoke Lord Level, after a pause. "I was given to understand by Major Carlen that when Captain Cross proposed for you, you refused him; that it was only by dint of pressure and persuasion that you consented to the engagement. Major Carlen told me that as the time went on you became so miserable under it, hating Captain Cross with a greater dislike day by day, that he had resolved before I spoke *to save you by breaking it off*. Was this the case, or not?"

"Yes, it was. It is true that I felt wretchedly miserable in the prospect of marrying Captain Cross. And oh, how I thank papa for having himself resolved to break it off. He did not tell me that."

"Because I have some honour of my own; and I would not take you sneakingly from Cross, or any other man. You must come to me above board in all ways, Blanche, or not at all."

Blanche felt her heart beating. She turned to glance at him, fearing what he might mean.

"So that if there is anything behind the scenes which has been kept from me; that is, if it be not of your own good and free will that you marry me; if you gave up Captain Cross *liking* him, because—because—well, though I feel ashamed to suggest such a thing—because my rank may be somewhat higher than his, or for any other reason: why then matters had better be at an end between us. No harm will have been done, Blanche."

Blanche's face was drawn and white. "Do you mean that you wish to give me up?"

"*Wish* it! It would be the greatest pain I could ever know in life. My dear, have you failed to understand me? I want you; I want you to be my wife; but not at the sacrifice of my honour. If Captain Cross ——"

Blanche broke down. "Oh, *don't* leave me for him," she implored. "Of course, I could never, never marry him now; I would rather die. Indeed, I do not quite know what you mean. It was all just as you have been told by papa; there was nothing kept behind."

Lord Level pillowed her head upon his arm. "Blanche, my dear, it was you who invoked this," he whispered, "by talking of Mr. Ravensworth's reflection on you in his 'strict honour.' Be assured I would not leave you to Captain Cross unless compelled to do so, or to any other man."

Her tears were falling. Lord Level kissed them away.

"Shall I *buy* you, my love?—bind you to me with a golden fetter?" And, taking a small case from his waistcoat-pocket, he slipped upon her marriage finger a hoop of gold, studded with diamonds. His deep-grey eyes were strained upon her through their dark lashes—eyes which had done mischief in their day—and her hand was lingering in his.

"There, Blanche; you see I have bought you; you are my property now—my very own. And, my dear, the ring must be worn always as the keeper of the marriage-ring when you shall be my wife."

It was a most exquisite relief to her. Blanche liked him far better than she had liked Captain Cross. And as Lord Level pressed his last kiss upon her lips—for Mrs. Guy was heard approaching—Blanche could never be sure that she did not return it.

A few more interviews such as these, and the young lady would be in love with him heart and soul.

And it may as well be mentioned, ere the chapter quite closes, that Mr. Charles Strange was out of the way of all this plotting and planning and love-making. The whole of that spring he was over in Paris, watching a case involving English and French interests of importance, that was on before the French courts, and of which Brightman and Strange were the English solicitors.

(To be continued.)

MRS. S. C. HALL.

A BEAUTIFUL life is never fairer and nobler than when we see it lived bravely and fully to two ends at once, doing a double set of duties, making radiant two separate paths through God's world, scattering perfume in different directions at the same moment.

Such a twofold life, look at it which side we may, is the life of Anna Maria Hall. Her household story is one long strain that tells of woman's simplest and minutest home duties faithfully and thoroughly done; her public story tells of a gifted writer of the nineteenth century. It is this mingling of the domestic woman and the woman of talent into a lofty and graceful whole that makes us love to sketch her portrait and linger lovingly and reverently over every feature in it.

Anna Maria Fielding was born on January the 6th, 1800, at Bannow, in the County of Wexford, in Ireland. On both sides of her parentage a stream of fiery fluid—fluid that was likely to flash out into something uncommon in the child—came bounding into her veins. The Fieldings were an old Celtic race that had been flourishing in the days of Irish chivalry and romance, and the mother of the child, whose first cry was heard that winter's day at Bannow, came of a French Huguenot family, members of whom had rallied round the white plume of Henry of Navarre on many a battlefield. It was just the sort of mingled descent to produce in the child who sprang from it a quick, fertile brain, a lively, powerful, many-tinted imagination, and a warm, wide heart, that would bring forth a rich crop of varied sympathies.

Mrs. Fielding seems to have been well worthy of the task, put by God into her hands, of training and watching over such a daughter; and no doubt the authoress of "The Lights and Shades of Irish Life," owed much to her early education at this mother's side, and to early impressions gathered from her looks and words. Throughout their lives mother and daughter remained firm, warm friends, and their graves are near each other in that quiet, country churchyard, where only a few years since, amid a shower of flowers, a storm of tears, were laid the earthly remains of a woman rich in years and love and honours.

The greater part of Anna Maria Fielding's childhood was passed in the house of her grandmother's second husband in Wexford. Here the girl grew up with all the humour and all the pathos of the life of the Irish people round her, and with this humour and this pathos entering into and permeating through every fibre of her mental constitution. For she had, from the first, a singularly receptive, retentive intellect, that took in and kept impressions from everything with which it came

in contact. Here the child blossomed into early maidenhood, and here, day by day, a brighter spark of wit and fun twinkled and danced in her eyes, a more thoughtful sweetness gathered round brow and lip, a keener intelligence woke up in the brain, a deeper thrill throbbed in the warm, generous heart; while, year by year, new gifts of mind, new graces of character were unfolded beneath the eyes that watched her lovingly.

At sixteen Miss Fielding left Ireland and came to London, which, from this time forward, became her chief place of residence. We can fancy what an entirely new chapter of her life was now begun; what a great and strange change of experiences it was, as the girl, with her airy step and laughing eyes, went from her Irish country home into the midst of the London of that day.

There were the fine ladies rouging and curtseying and striving to make their skirts narrower and narrower and their waists shorter and shorter; there were soldiers with laurels from Waterloo fresh on their brows; there were the great talkers of society beginning to glide from the stately conversation of the eighteenth century, with its full flow and majesty, into the lighter and freer strain of a later day; there were the men of letters discussing the Waverley Novels, and the secret of their authorship; there was the mimic world of the theatres—a world, in truth, in itself, at that period, when such a radiancy of genius shone on the English stage. And into the midst of all this went smiling and chattering, and keenly observing, the young maiden, who hitherto had known no other phase of life than that of her western country home.

For eight years Anna Maria Fielding went on ripening and mellowing, until, at the age of twenty-four, she had bloomed into the sweet plant of womanhood: a plant bearing, like the orange tree, flower and fruit at once, flowers of grace and charm, fruit of intellectual power. It was high time now for the future author of so many heroines to find a hero to her mind; and accordingly he came, just at this period, on the scene in the person of a young barrister, Mr. Samuel Carter Hall. Minds of like cultivation, hearts that echoed each other in their throbs of earnest sympathy for all things that are sad and sorrowful upon earth, as well as with all that is high and pure, soon made a close intimacy spring up between Mr. S. C. Hall and Miss Fielding; an intimacy which ripened into love; and in 1824 the young Irish lady became the English barrister's wife, and was henceforth known as Mrs. S. C. Hall.

Mr. S. C. Hall's legal studies were of short duration. The law was probably never a congenial field for his efforts, and very soon he found work which suited him much better; work which exactly suited his powers and capabilities; work in which no one could be such an able helper to him as his wife. He took the editorship of a favourite periodical of the day, and from that time forward his name and that of Mrs. S. C. Hall—for at once she became a sharer in his employment—became connected honourably with literature.

In 1825 they brought out an elegant volume called "The Amulet;" and other products of their joint talent and industry went on in bright and swift procession till death dissolved the true, brave partnership. The periodical which, perhaps, is most closely belonging to their name is "The Art Journal;" but there are legions besides, of which our limited space does not allow us to speak.

In 1828, when she herself was twenty-eight, Mrs. S. C. Hall's first independent book made its appearance under the title of "Sketches of Irish Character." It was well received by the public, and was rapidly succeeded by other children of her brain. Of these, and of their various degrees of merit we have, of course, no time to treat. "The Lights and Shadows of Irish Life" is, perhaps, her best known and most popular work; and as an instance of Mrs. S. C. Hall's peculiar power of mingling, in one picture, high-class humour and pathos, we would mention the old Irish nurse in "Marion; or, a Young Maid's Fortunes."

All the while that Mrs. S. C. Hall was thus incessantly throughout her life employed in earnest, sustained literary work, the picture of her home story is one of quiet beauty. She was a most devoted and affectionate wife, and to her her husband owed, as many a touching word written and spoken by him proves, his clearest sunshine, his purest and sweetest refreshment. Not the smallest domestic duty, however trifling, was left undone by her; her household affairs moved on smooth, noiseless wheels of perfect order; everything there was gracefully done, and thoroughly and modestly done as well, because the mistress's eye was upon all.

She was not granted the joy of motherhood, but the true mother's heart was in her, and everywhere, whether in the well-appointed nursery of the stately country house, or the home for destitute orphans, she was the children's friend. Besides this, she adopted a little girl, and brought her up as her own daughter, performing towards her, in every respect, a mother's careful, loving part. Literary work and literary fame in nothing blunted the keenness of her woman's tenderness, in nothing dimmed the soft halo round her womanhood. Either as an authoress, or as a woman, the young generation may look up at her picture as something to be kept as a pattern for imitation.

Mrs. S. C. Hall's drawing-room was one of those favoured rooms where a spell of ease and freedom seems always to be at work; drawing everyone that enters under its beneficent influence, and yet harmonising all into one blended whole, whatever widely differing elements may be there.

In that drawing-room where this gracious, kindly magic worked; a magic which was, in truth, simply the pervading influence of her who reigned there; men and women always looked their best, and talked their best, and were, in short, their very best selves. In that drawing-room many a wide scheme of charity was originated or furthered and

strengthened. In that drawing-room met all the wit and genius which, through more than fifty years, made the world laugh and weep, and sent streams of amusement and instruction flowing hither and thither in the land.

What a long list of names rises to the lips, springs up under the pen, as we think of that drawing-room! What a crowd of figures come down from their niches in England's pantheon, and gather round the well-loved form and genial face of her who was mistress there! We cannot help stopping to gaze for a moment at the throng.

Whose is that bright, handsome woman's face, so full of fire and of fresh, young power, which, just at this instant, is close to the mistress of the house, and the red lips whisper some saucy criticism on an unfortunate cap or dress hard by? What petulant grace there is in every movement of the delicate neck, what joyous freedom in the clear, bell-like laugh! Who that watches her can guess that hers is to be a dark, tragical story; that a sad mystery will envelope the fate of her who the world knows already so well as "L. E. L."

Here are two men with faces that attract our notice. How thoughts and fancies are coming and going in their eyes and on their lips. But what strikes us yet more than their looks, is the flow of words that is passing, and repassing, swirling, surging, and eddying between them. "How they do talk," we can't help murmuring beneath our breath; and yet we feel that the expression is just a trifle disrespectful when we hear the crowd of subjects, some deep, some feather-light, which are discussed in rapid succession. We listen till our poor brains are in a very whirl of confusion. But the wondrous pair are talking still as vigorously and exhaustively as if they had only just begun. Then we turn away in hopeless despair but do not so much marvel at our own slowness of wit when we hear that we have been listening to Charles Lamb and Samuel Coleridge.

Standing in yonder window is one in a clerical dress. "How handsome he is!" is our first exclamation, but an instant after we cry out, "He actually squints."

Yet, squint or no squint, how the ladies are crowding round him, hanging on his words, struggling to win each one at least a recognising smile. He is a saint; a hero now; the god of the idolatry of thousands; but before many years have gone by, the name of Edward Irving will be uttered with a sometimes mocking, sometimes pitying significance in tone and glance.

Now we have leapt lightly with fancy's help over several years, and we are looking again into that drawing-room, which is as full as ever. With what a mixture of homage and queenliness the mistress of the house is receiving that grand old man, with the eyes in which gentleness and majesty sit enthroned in so wondrous and so fair a union: a union such as only genius can make: what calm strength there is on that brow, what tenderness in that mouth! Who would not long to draw near and hear the voice of William Wordsworth?

Again years have sped by; many years; and that drawing-room is still full and still resounding with the hum of many voices. And now we need no more the spell of fancy, for memory has taken her place. At the side of Mrs. S. C. Hall, where poor L. E. L. stood long ago, is another face, which bears a threefold stamp, for it has been sealed by beauty, and intellect, and soul. Her gentle voice is music itself. She of whose fair inner self that strangely beautiful face is the true outward and visible sign is with us still.* Long may she shine for us. Long may her name be a household word spoken in English homes—the authoress of "East Lynne."

But we have no further space to dwell on those who are grouped in so vast and brilliant a company around the portrait of Mrs. S. C. Hall. We have only room to give one or two more touches to her own picture before we close.

Mrs. S. C. Hall's active, warm, Christian sympathy; a sympathy which was awake to every call from suffering, from dreary want, from the darkest corners of God's earth; forms one of the most marked and most beautiful traits in her character. If any grand work of love and mercy was suggested, and the indolent and self-absorbed shook their heads, saying, "It never can, it never will be done," Mrs. S. C. Hall's clear head and broad, genial heart were sure to come to the front, and turn the vague project into reality. If any established charity began to languish, the resolute energy of Mrs. S. C. Hall, if her interest in the matter could be aroused, was certain to put fresh life into it. "It is really too much trouble," that phrase which is so frequently in the mouths of Young England reclining in arm-chairs and talking about "the æsthetical," was never heard from her lips.

The generous liberality of Mrs. S. C. Hall's nature was often displayed in yet another way, when with ready kindliness she spoke words of encouragement to young travellers beginning to tread the path of literature. Many such are there who, like the author of this paper herself, can remember the friendly grasp of the dear, warm hand, the tones of the quiet voice, speaking some sentence of cheering praise that gave the spirit to go on just at the moment when it was needed.

Mrs. S. C. Hall enjoyed tokens of royal favour, both in a pension of £100 a year which was settled upon her, and in a present from the Queen, of portraits of herself and the Prince Consort. The affection and reverence of the general public was also shown by a considerable collection which was presented to them, on their sixty-second wedding day, at a meeting presided over by Lord Shaftesbury. At that meeting Mr. S. C. Hall told how their golden wedding-day had been spent.

Honoured to the last, loved to the last, working to the last, Mrs. S. C. Hall lived on till the age of eighty-one. Then, after but a short illness, she passed into her home above.

ALICE KING.

* Words written before the sad event of 1887.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

KATIE: A REMINISCENCE.

By T. Faed, R.A.

IF you have nothing better to do, and are disposed to listen to a garrulous old man fighting his battle over again, accompany me for a stroll up Hillside Road, and I'll do my best to entertain you with recollections now, alas, fifty years old, yet so young and fresh that they seem but of yesterday.

Every turn in that road has its little green spot enshrined in my memory. It is not a long road; three miles being about its full extent; after which it breaks into footpaths, some leading to far outlying shepherds' cots, others to burns and lochs, dear to fishermen. I shall make our starting point Hirston Mill, Harestane Mill in olden days.

There is nothing very interesting about the place, except to myself. It was in the immediate neighbourhood that I first saw the light. I don't think that the mill, old as it was, could claim the memory of a murder; nor had any terrible battles been fought in its vicinity, leaving their tumuli over the buried dead. No big stone marked the spot where a favourite leader had fallen; though, as a boy, I fondly believed that a moss-covered block in the centre of the Standing Stane field denoted the grave of some forgotten hero.

Old, matter-of fact, Sandy Cairns put a cruel stop to my romancing, by telling me that he and Johnny Green, of the Meadows, put it up some forty years previously, for the prosaic purpose of a scratching-stone for the cattle. Still, I retained a sort of lingering feeling that the grey block had a story; for I knew well that all the Johnny Greens and Sandy Cairns in the country at that time could not have carried it to the spot where it stood; and no one ever attempted to explain its presence in the long stretch of meadow land.

I knew nothing then of glaciers, nor of the strange part they played in the geological puzzle of the country, so I clung, and still cling, to my early notions. Ah, science rudely dispels many of our boyhood's pleasant dreams!

Now we will take the turn to the left, and in five minutes shall be at Hillside; the farm which gives its name to the road and the burn.

You see that stack-yard? Forty-five years ago a picturesque old cottage stood there, wherein abode old Jean Logan, her son and his wife, with some half-a-dozen children. They emigrated to Canada.

I remember them well as they passed our house in a cart on their way to the ship that was to bear them across the wide ocean to the far western land, all crying their hearts out, except the father; and he, poor man, looked sad enough.

They little then knew that they were leaving poverty for plenty. Now they are lords of the soil, which their own strong arms have won from the wilderness of nature. Twelve pounds a year had been the father's fee as a cotman while in his own country !

There, down the road, goes Flora McGhee. You have heard of her from me before, I am sure. She was born in the Hillside. Oh, what a change has come over her ! She was, for many years, the most madly loved and one of the most beautiful lassies in all the country side. You had but a passing glimpse of her, and yet you might have observed some lingering traces of the exceeding loveliness she once possessed. You did not ? Ah, but I did. Looking back, with half-closed eyes down the long vista of bygone years, I saw the young face struggling with the old. The voice was there, and the old homely greeting. The bright smile still lingered in the corners of her eyes, a something of the witchery that in the olden days set many heads a throbbing.

Poor Flora ! the path of her life has not been strewn with roses. Of her brothers and sisters, she alone is left. Her husband died many years ago, and in the year gone by she lost her eldest daughter, as lovely a lassie as herself in her young days, I am told.

But here is Hillside Brig, which spans the burn at the spot where once stood an older Hirston Mill, of which, as you see, only a portion of the ancient gable remains. There it is just below that white-washed house that glints through the trees.

Of all places in that southern county, none are so dear to me as that burn with its banks and braes. From my earliest recollections it was to me a joy, a thing of beauty. The dash and ripple of its waters will ever bring back to me the fondest memories of my boyhood ; and especially of those happy Saturday afternoons, when, bared to the shoulders, I guddled the trout in its well-stocked pools.

While I am speaking to you, I hear its voice calling me back to the days that return no more. Look at its dark lichened rocks shaded by the over-hanging birks and hazels. Listen to the murmur of its tiny hidden feeders, some boldly bounding over the stones, and others stealing quietly round by pebbly ways, each one to pay its crystal tribute to that clear-bottomed pool with its iridescent, bell-like bubbles, beautiful as their existence is brief.

Look at that ash-tree bending so gracefully over the wimpling stream. Kneel by its margin, and shade your eyes with your hands ; watch the little tiny "brown-backs" as they dart between their favourite stones.

Look again just where the serpent-like roots of that old oak twine their trellis-work over the smooth slate rock, on which are many

names and initials that have outlived the loving hands that carved them on the long-enduring stone.

Look again just by that old root—that was "Fanny's bower." In my mind's eye I see her with her sister Jeanie and Flora McGhee, three graces full of naturalness, full of intelligence, and one, at least, full of poetry. Oh, the dear old glen! In time it became my studio. I painted it in all its varied aspects, ever changing, ever new. Why did I not become a painter of glens with their burns and their birken bowers, and the sunbeams that played among the trees and flecked the mossy banks? Ay, and the other sunbeams, more bright and beautiful than ever tipped the hills with gold! Ah, all is changed now. The tiny saplings have grown to tall trees, and I have become an old man!

Look! there is a wee bairnie in danger. A cart had been left at the road-side with a little child in it, the sole guardian of a load of fresh herrings. The pony, probably thinking that it was master for the time, had taken the bit in its teeth, and, while feeding on the grass that grew along the road-side, had nearly capsized the rickety vehicle. I rescued the little thing from its perilous position, and in no mild mood was denouncing the carelessness of certain invisible and unknown parties, when, looking at the side of the cart, I read a name which called up thoughts and recollections that for a time must interrupt my description of Hillside Road and its many beauties.

The spirit of the past is on me now. Of all the memories of my early days which the old cart summons back from the past, the one I am now about to relate is certainly the strangest, the saddest, and the one best worth telling.

I may as well remind you, that my father was a mill-wright, and, when I was a boy, employed a great many men, Mike Sullivan among the rest. Mike had entered my father's service as an apprentice, and all through his life made himself generally useful.

I loved Mike much, for he was one of those good souls who possessed the rare magical power of appealing to the child-heart. I used to spend a great part of my pocket-money in buying snuff for him. The manner in which he thanked me for the gifts was ample amends for my self-deprivation of "bull's-eyes" and toffee.

Mike was very handsome, but had met with an accident in early youth that lamed him for life, and obtained for him the name of Limping Sullivan. Almost before he was out of his apprenticeship he married Jenny O'Brien, a very lovely girl, but sprung from a bad stock. Her father was an ingenious sort of man; perhaps too ingenious; for he used to make and circulate counterfeit coins, which, among the simple country folks, went by the name of "O'Brien's sleek sixpences." I do not remember whether his felonies met their well-deserved punishment or not. Jenny, his eldest daughter, was too good-looking to have her chances in life crossed by any of her father's peccadilloes; but she was a bad bargain for poor

Mike. She bore him a large family, and, strange as it may seem, all were good-looking, but not one resembled the other. Katie, the first-born, my heroine, was the grandest creation of them all, and possessed the old, high-born, black Spanish-Irish look of her father.

I was a boy about fourteen when Katie first began to attract my attention. She was my junior by two years. The school to which I went was within a hundred yards of a little line of brick-built houses known as the Jingling Row, which were inhabited mostly by the poorest class in the town. Snowball skirmishes and battles of a more pronounced sort occasionally took place between the boys of the school and the juvenile "roughs" of the Row. In all such aggressive raids and faction-fights there is certain to be a leader on each side.

In the absence of Davie Dobson I led the school; and I blush to say that at times I led it against a commander in petticoats; for Katie, by acclaim, was the leader of the Row boys, and a most potent Amazonian warrior she was at the head of her well-organised forces. I see her now, with her long black unkempt hair streaming back upon the wind, and her dark, flashing eyes as she rushed into the fray; and she had at command a choice selection of expletives which none of our side would have dared to make use of, but which, as she shouted them aloud, seemed, like the bagpipes of Waterloo, to put fresh spirit into her forces.

Time, the healer of all earthly feuds, brought a truce between the school and the Row. Katie got employed at a cotton-mill in the town, and I went to reside with some friends in a distant part of the country. During that absence the name of Katie was not forgotten. I heard, through correspondence with my friends at home, more especially my brother Henry, that the harum-scarum lassie was developing into a grand woman. If my memory serves me aright, he in his letters christened her the Grecian Queen; and that royal title, by which she was known far and near about the country side, still clings to her.

It might be about eighteen months after our last desperate encounter that I met her between the School and the Sluices. We were alone, face to face. She was still, to a degree, unkempt and wild-looking, and her feet were still bare; but I saw an indescribable something about her that told me of a hidden influence that was beginning to soften and harmonise her nature.

"Well, Katie," said I.

"Well," replied she, with a half-defiant tone and all-curious air.

I felt somewhat confused, for with Katie it had always been war; not so much with her as with her whole street. I scarcely knew how to carry on the conversation I had initiated. In my confusion I asked how her father was getting on, not remembering at the time that he was "doing" two months in Kirkhadim gaol for poaching.

This ill-timed question nearly wrecked the peace-laden craft we were both so desirous, apparently, to steer to harbour; but she kept

wonderfully calm. I saw by the heaving of her bosom the struggle at her heart as she replied, with flashing eyes, "As well as a man can be when he is shut up in a gaol." In my confusion I stammered forth, in order to recover my position, a great many kind words in praise of poor Mike. Katie's look softened, and I seized the opportunity to try and unravel the tangled skein of her strange nature. I asked her to let me know when next time she intended to visit her father, and if she would kindly take some snuff to him as a present from me. She soon grew calm, and looking into my face in a strange, expressive way, her dark eyes glistening with the gathering tears, said, "Why have you always been so cruel, when you and the rest of your school pelted us? Will you ever do it again?"

"No, on my soul, Katie, I never will, nor let anyone else do it, if I can help it. But I have never pelted you. I never struck you with a stone; I never aimed at you."

"Didn't you? Then why did you always look at me as if you hated me?" The swiftly gathering waters overflowed her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. "You never, never spoke a kind word to me. I would have gone on my knees to you if you had. I hated all the boys in your school and could have killed them; but you were kind to father and I liked you."

"And yet, Katie," I returned, "don't you remember the day you flew at my neck and tore my collar away?"

A smile gathered about her mouth, and a flashing in her eyes told me that the wild-cat portion of her nature had not died out, as she quickly replied: "Yes, I remember it all. I was mad. I remember you held my hands and I tried to bite you. I told my father all about it, and he made me promise never to fight again, and I never have. You were always so calm. I remember how you looked at me that day when you said 'Is this Mike Sullivan's daughter?' That was the beginning of my taking myself up; but you left the town so soon after, that I had no chance to tell you of my good resolutions. I'd have given all the world, had I possessed it, to let you know how ashamed I was of myself. Will you forget it all and forgive me?"

"My poor girl, I forgive you freely—not that I have anything to forgive. You only followed the fashion of others, and a gallant leader you were. But, Katie, what has wrought this great change in you? Surely it is not through me alone that you are altered! You are so pretty—yes, you are—and so neat! So different from what you were."

She flung back her head with something of the old wild toss, and asked with a half coy, half beseeching look, and yet a look that knew the answer that must come: "Am I really and truly pretty?"

"Why do you ask me, Katie? Doesn't everybody tell you so?"

"Yes; but what do I care for everybody? What do I care for what a set of Jingling Row weavers say?"

She was trembling like the leaf of the linden tree. The blush which had suffused her cheeks was dying gently away, and she stood before me at that instant of time as lovely a young creature as poet or painter ever beheld in their most rapturous dreams. I was silent awhile, and fixed my gaze on the ground, for I dared no longer to look on the surpassing loveliness. Without raising my head, I said:

"Katie, we will be friends now; give me your hand."

She gave it readily, and pressed mine to her lips. What could I do? I was fascinated. I drew her slim form close to me and kissed her unreluctant lips. It was a moment of ineffable bliss for both.

Then she spoke.

"Oh, if you had struck me when I tore your collar I never would have done what I have done now. And you never did hate me, and I have been worrying myself all this time about nothing; less than nothing!" She hid her face in her hands and sobbed. "What's the use of my being good and right? My father's a poacher, and my mother—she's no mother to me."

We talked a long time, I fear, in a somewhat incoherent manner, for we were neither of us experts in love-making, and the boy and girl style of courtship was no longer of use, for a new feeling had entered our hearts. It was difficult for me to believe that the blushful, beautiful being at my side was the wild, untamable Katie; that those modest, drooping, almost timid eyes had flashed tigress-like when she darted her hands at my throat. And, more marvellous still, was I standing lovingly beside her and yielding up my heart through the delight of my eye!

Oh, love, Heaven knows, thou art a strange transformer!

However, the time soon came, and perhaps fortunately so, when I had, in the old phrase, to set out into the world to push my fortune, and so school fights and scores of other things were almost forgotten; but not Katie. She often came across my mind, but the memory was mingled with a dread. Up to the age of thirteen she had been a fierce little gipsy, a young Mœnad, and to my thinking would never be aught else. I saw, even in her early girlhood, something of a grand, fighting, flushing type of beauty; but that a few years could have wrought such a change in her was beyond my calculation.

A year and more passed away, and again I returned home to spend my brief holiday.

When wandering from the mill, townwards, I saw coming towards me a tall, strapping, graceful girl, and when we were within twenty yards of each other I recognised the championess of the Row. What a transformation! Bare-headed, with her glossy locks neatly braided over her broad, low forehead. From ear to ear the silken snood secured her back hair, though at times a vagrant lock took to playing with the breeze. The contour of her face, her eyes, nose, mouth and chin, were of the Grecian type, and more beautiful than any

"antique" I ever saw. Her neck, a veritable pillar, was seemingly proud of the capital it supported. Though scarcely sixteen, her figure was almost fully developed, lithe and supple as a roe deer, and long of limb, with an arched instep that could not be destroyed even by country-made shoes. And all this perfect machine was set in motion by the journeyman hand of nature. Happily she was void of affectation, that too often attendant curse of beauty.

She recognised me, and sorely troubled she appeared. As we neared each other she assumed something of her former defiant air, but which instantly gave place to a flush of shame that added a new charm to her beauty.

It is unnecessary to say that this meeting was not our last. Many a tryst was faithfully kept, and many risks were run with her neighbours of the Row. Young as I was, I often asked myself if my first wild enthusiasm was built upon a sure foundation. When we were together my heart answered "Yes;" but in her absence the reply was "No." Love was not the magician that I had at first supposed.

There was a certain romantic feeling that carried us on swimmingly for a time, and I had in the first burst of my enthusiasm poured out what I tried to convince myself was my soul. But somehow its current began to flow less fluently the oftener that we met. Perhaps we met too often. Our meetings were of course no secret in a small country town. Katie being apparently loved by one above her station, soon created quite a *furore* among the gossips, male and female. Lovers of all ranks and ages flocked round the mill-girl. But she was faithful to me; and for a time I thought, and was happy in so thinking, that my influence and her dawning womanhood might raise her above the gross influence of her surroundings.

But the tigress was there, loving although she was. She had a heart, too, poor lassie, but her impulses were downwards. Heaven only knows what I might have made of her had I been able to implant the germs of good thoughts in her heart and train their growth, but I was too young for the task. Each time that we parted I had a terrible struggle with my heart. A sleepless night and a restless day followed on every twilight meeting. My soul yearned, as soon as we parted, to be with her again. Yet I felt my love was cooling, and that her beauty was powerless to dispel the chilling cloud that was gathering around me.

But, alas! never came back the hour when first I thought I saw the marvels that love was working in her strong nature—that first hour when, with a pure heart, she threw herself weeping on my breast. I did not know then what had taken possession of us. I only saw a beautiful tearful maiden, still half savage, before me, imploring my forgiveness. The quality of mercy between us was not strained, but descended on us like softest summer rain, sweet flowers of tender affection springing where it fell.

But time soon showed that Katie was still Katie.

How I tried to excuse and explain away to myself the fierce instincts that every now and then, like the hidden fires of a volcano, broke through the crust of self-imposed restraint. God knows I never sought the meeting that had planted the seed that was beginning to bear bitter fruit. She was beautiful—that was all I could say, and I said it times unnumbered. My emotional nature made me an easy and early victim to what is conventionally termed the tender passion; but my love for the feminine soon began a hand-to-hand fight with my love for the beautiful.

From first to last my feelings towards her were perfectly pure. Not a single thought of impropriety ever entered my mind. I was chivalrous as any olden knight—as Sir Galahad himself, sans peur et sans reproche. She was Haidee, but I was not Don Juan. Time was powerless to revive my fading love.

I tried heart and soul to re-create the feelings of joy that were mine when the half-tamed and rebellious girl, tearful and trembling, rushed into my arms. Alas! it was of no avail. You will say with me, that she deserved every consideration—a girl in a mill, mingling with all that is coarse and vulgar from morn till night, without the corrective of a refining influence at home. Ah, me! that such a nature should lurk behind so beautiful a face! The thought almost upset my belief in the fitness of created things. I was young then; now I know better. The time of our parting was approaching. During the last few days of our meetings I dreaded to hear her speak her opinion on any subject; but the fates had wisely willed that I was to see her in all her mental inborn ugliness. I heard that she had had a quarrel with her mother, and that in the angry scene that ensued, Katie's words and behaviour were such that at this distant date I try in vain to draw the veil of oblivion across the sad story.

Ere we parted she told me she was going to leave the town, as it would become hateful to her after I went away. I advised her not to do so, but without avail. I, however, got a promise that money was never to be an excuse for her wrong-doing, and that she would write to me whenever she found herself in straits. She had fixed to go to Ashton. My heart troubled for her, because I knew that her beauty would bring her many temptations.

From this time my more minute knowledge of Katie ceased. Twice during the succeeding twelve months she wrote for help, which I gladly sent. Two years passed, and I returned home to spend my month's holiday. I soon learned that Katie had for some time been living with her father. This news made my heart ache. I longed, yet dreaded to see her. My haunting fear was that her feet would stray from the right path, so I thought it better to leave our meeting to chance, and that chance very soon came about.

I was fishing one afternoon in the river when I came on her, sitting on the bank above a favourite pool of mine, no doubt waiting for me.

She knew me to be an enthusiastic angler, and, as the river was in good fly, she probably guessed that I should be at its side. Our meeting was a painful one to me, and it must also have been so to her. She was changed. There were indications of hollows in her cheeks, and there was a darkness round her eyes. She was still lovely, but something chilled my heart; I could not tell what; something that kept me silent for a space. She did not look me in the face, but pressed both her hands to her heart as if in pain. Then I spoke:

"Did you know, Katie, that I was home?"

"Yes, yes; and I wished so to see you." She was looking at me while she spoke, but her eyes fell.

"Are you really, Katie, glad to see me?"

"Oh, yes. Believe me or not, I never loved anyone but you. If you had taken me with you I would have been your slave. Aye! you may well look into my face. I would have been yours, all yours, and neither my cheeks nor my eyes would have been as they are, nor would I have been shedding the bitter tears I do now."

A suspicion flashed across my mind that she was holding something back; that she had something to tell me, but hesitated how to shape it into words. I saw that she had fallen from what she had been in the bygone days.

"But why weep, Katie?" I asked her, to give her the chance I saw she was seeking for. She stretched her hands towards me and implored me to take them in mine. I did so. Looking into her great, trembling, troubled eyes, I said, "Katie, are you a good girl?"

No answer came to my question, but she hung her head and moaned piteously. I turned away for the moment. I would not intrude upon the solitude of her sorrow. Then, with a convulsive effort, she gasped out: "Why did you leave me to others? To you I gave a pure heart, but with it you would not accept myself. I did not blame you. How I have prayed in my weak, wayward moments that you were by me. Oh! I have been so tempted, so persecuted, so deceived. God is my witness to the truth of what I tell you. I have been more sinned against than sinning. Believe me or believe me not; I am not trying to excuse myself. No excuse, no repentance will bring back the jewel I have lost. What am I? And what shall I do, when—Tell me—tell me—?" Her utterance became choked, and she sank down on the daisied bank at my side.

How I felt for the poor lost girl, I have not the power to tell. She seemed to me at that moment something sacred, something sanctified by terrible suffering and purified by penitent confession; a lone woman whose sad story was an appeal to the inmost heart of humanity. I tried to soothe her. Her agony was so terrible that I can recall little of what she said until my heart thrilled with the words:

"I am what I am. My onward journey is from darkness into deeper darkness; but this meeting and your forgiveness will shine on

me through the blackness of my lonely night, and God grant it may be a guiding star to me. To me, no longer the Village Beauty, no longer the Grecian Queen! to me who must wander on till death with the finger of scorn pointed in jeering triumph at me wherever I go. Good-bye! You will never regret this meeting, so longed for by me; for your kind words have brought back dear memories of the days when my life was as pure as the summer sky above us now —dear dreams of Auld Lang Syne, never to be fulfilled. Good-bye —I must part from you before the power which your words and presence have given me pass away. Farewell."

From that day, when she passed down the riverside and the birken knoll hid her from my sight, until I shook hands, a few minutes ago, with that wild-looking Grecian mother, I have never beheld Katie. Poor lassie! her life has been a sad one; but she has had many unknown friends; some of them, perhaps, like myself, early lovers. She has, however, through good and evil report, worked out her promise to me, for all the tidings that have reached me concerning her have been to her credit. She lives a lonely life in the little town, pitied by some and shunned by others. Is Katie's life a type of that of a Village Beauty?

A VALENTINE.

What shall I send to my lady fair?
A gem to sparkle in breast or hair?
What earth most prizes of rich or rare,
Say, shall I send to my lady fair?

Or shall I bind her a posy sweet,
With a true lover's knot, to lay at her feet?
With the earliest dawn my love to greet—
Say if this were an offering meet?

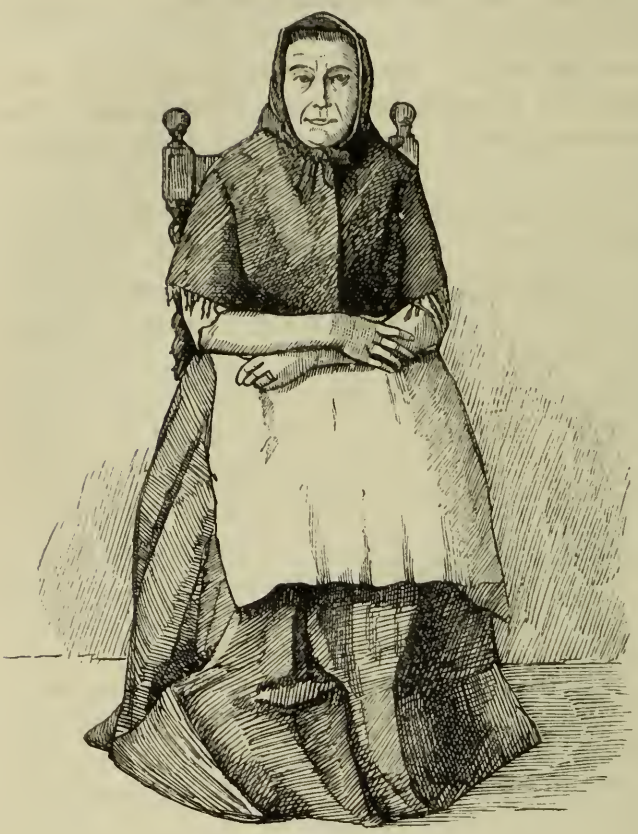
Or shall I waft her a wish, a sigh,
On the passing breeze as it floateth by,
Bidding it whisper her, ere it die,
That I will love her eternally?

The gem that hides in the distant mine,
The flower that blooms where the sunbeams shine,
The thoughts that like tendrils around her twine—
Which were the worthiest Valentine?

E. Leith.

LETTERS FROM MAJORCA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland,' "Under Northern Skies," etc., etc.



Barbara.

Palma, June, 1887.

My Dear E. — We returned to Palma, wondering much what news would await our arrival. At the station we separated. Mr. Bateman went up to Il Tereno; I went off to our palace. We agreed to meet at the Consulate in two hours' time.

I confess that I felt nervous and anxious as the karrawakky rattled off, and we passed through one of the gateways into the precincts of the town. To begin with, I had a very stupid old driver. Our palace is situated in the Calle de la Paz, and he declared that he had never heard of the Calle de la Paz. The people here pronounce it *Pow*, and the difference of a hair's breadth in sound is quite enough to send them and their stupidity altogether abroad. At last I had to become my own driver and lead the way.

We arrived. The bell echoed through the silent rooms. Catalina appeared in answer to the summons, and threw up her hands and eyes with all the theatrical action to which those Southern races are given. She looked the object of despair, and the rooms were silent no longer. Although she knew that I could not understand a word, she poured forth a torrent of phrases in her highest tones, accompanied by innumerable signs and gestures.

One thing, at least, was evident. A. was not there. He had failed to keep his appointment, and must be ill. James, too, was not forthcoming, but our cordon bleu managed to make me understand

that she expected him every moment. In the meantime Catalina proposed that I should refresh myself with a second breakfast, a suggestion that, after our early and hasty meal at La Puebla, was at once seconded.

I confess that I felt uncomfortable—very much like a fish out of water; very much as if my pied-à-terre were crumbling beneath me. If A. were really ill and unable to return, I should become sole inhabitant of this lordly palace, and find myself in a state of solitary grandeur never dreamed of or desired.

Before my last handleless cup of tea had disappeared, the bell once more sounded through the echoing halls—and enter James. He had never been more welcome; not even when coming down the Puig Major.

"Well!" cried I. "What does it all mean? How is Mr. A.?"

"Very bad, sir," replied James. "Quite light-headed. Doesn't know what he's about. Having three doctors to him to-day."

This was more than startling; it was alarming. James himself looked ill, and not in a condition to be about.

"You, too, seem ill, James," I said. "What is it?"

"Don't know, sir. Frightful headache. Can't sleep. Can hardly crawl. Managed to get round here. Anxious about you. Hope you're not going to be ill, too—all of us leave our bones in a foreign land."

James was evidently in a cheerful mood.

"What do the doctors say is the matter with your master?"

"Only one has seen him as yet—Dr. M. Doesn't seem quite clear in his mind about it; chops and changes about like a weather-cock. First says it's one thing, then another, then a combination. I don't think much of these Spanish doctors, sir. There's to be a consultation this morning at twelve o'clock. Hope they'll make out something between them."

Anxiety and impatience would be controlled no longer. The best and the worst must be known. I must see A. and judge for myself. As I had to pass the photographer's I took with me the plates of the Albufera and Alcudia to be developed.

"Mr. A. won't know you, sir," said James. "But, of course, you will like to see him."

The streets were hot and sunny, more picturesque and beautiful than ever, in contrast with the unadorned little town of La Puebla. But in my anxiety the overhanging eaves, the ancient courts, all the wonderful wrought iron work I passed, failed to charm. The melancholy cry of the caged quails seemed fraught with omen.

Arrived at the Consulate, Barbara—impassive Barbara—met me with a solemn gesture. No torrent of words here, but an expression far more effective. Her great black eyes flashed sorrow and sympathy from their depths. She shook her head with an abandonment worthy of her own last hour.

Mr. Mark approached. His countenance dispelled my final spark of hope. It was despair itself.

"He's very ill, very ill indeed," he said. "Rapidly going from bad to worse."

"But what is it? What is he suffering from?"

"Opinions differ. For one thing he has acute inflammation of the lungs; about that there is no doubt. Furthermore, Dr. M. thinks that he has a touch of gastric fever. Dr. N. has just seen him, and says it is typhoid. They have both been here this morning, and I expect them again every moment in consultation with Dr. O."

"Terrible," I cried, whilst my heart sank a good many degrees below zero. "There must be great danger."

"Very great. I give up all hope. But come and see him, though he won't know you."

Strangely enough, he did know me. For the short time I remained in the room, his consciousness seemed to return. I mentioned our projected drive through the island; our intended visit to Port Mahon and the Talayots of Minorca. He took interest in all; gave me a commission to a friend of his in the sister island, which he said I must now visit alone; entrusted me with a long and complicated message, and seemed perfectly rational and clear-headed. The moment I left the room he sank back into unconsciousness and delirium.

"I cannot account for it," said Mr. Mark afterwards. "Cannot imagine what strange influence recalled his wandering mind." Then he told me a circumstance that greatly touched me. How that on Tuesday and Wednesday, his first wandering days, his ramblings had been chiefly about myself, coupled with repeated expressions of sympathy in all our recent sorrow.

The bell rang and the doctors were announced. Their faces were grave and desponding; not especially so about the present case, but very much as their ordinary condition. A more melancholy deputation I have never seen. As I watched them disappear into the sick room, I felt almost thankful that A. was not sufficiently conscious to feel their depressing influence. For though he had roused up for me, by some subtle mesmeric or other power, he did not do so for them.

I waited without. Mr. Mark was with the doctors; I could do no good, and might possibly be in the way. Presently they returned, more depressing than ever. Our conversation was carried on in French.

"What report of the patient?" I asked.

"The position is extremely grave. There is the greatest danger."

"But it is not hopeless?"

"Not absolutely hopeless, but extremely critical. Still, whilst life remains, we will not despair."

"And the fever? Is it gastric or typhoid?"

"We are divided in opinion," replied Dr. M. "I consider it

gastric, Dr. N. thinks it undoubtedly typhoid. The symptoms are a little contradictory. I still believe there has been sunstroke."

"What has caused the mischief to the lungs?"

"He came up here on Monday after you had left, with a racking headache; declared it was sunstroke, and that plenty of air would cure it. He threw open all doors and windows, and for hours walked about in the lightest of costumes, 'to cool his head.' This is the result."

Whilst we were talking, again the bell rang, and a fourth official appeared on the scene.

"Another doctor!" I cried in astonishment. "How many more?"

But I was mistaken. It was only the doctors' assistant or "dresser." He cuts off heads and arms and legs for them, puts on bandages, and makes himself generally useful. He walked about with a pair of shears in his hands that would have frightened the very life out of a nervous invalid. With these he played and toyed affectionately, just as a Spanish woman toys with her fan.

He was a most peculiar-looking man. A sort of medical Paganini, all arms and legs; tall, gaunt, cadaverous, with wild eyes that glared at you through glasses, and, in conjunction with those playful scissors, froze the marrow in your bones.

After they had all left—to return again in the afternoon—we had a serious conversation in the study. It was decided at once to telegraph the sad news to A.'s father in England. I suggested that they should send out a doctor and a nurse. The Consul thought not. He has great confidence in the Mallorcan doctors. I have none. In typhoid fever, the strength of the patient should be kept up as much as possible. The Mallorcan doctors believe in absolute starvation. In every way their treatment is opposed to our English ideas.

Mr. Bateman came down, and was also of the same opinion; and his opinion is worth far more than mine, for he has himself had typhoid fever three times. Any amount of nourishment, he declared. But we are not to have our way.

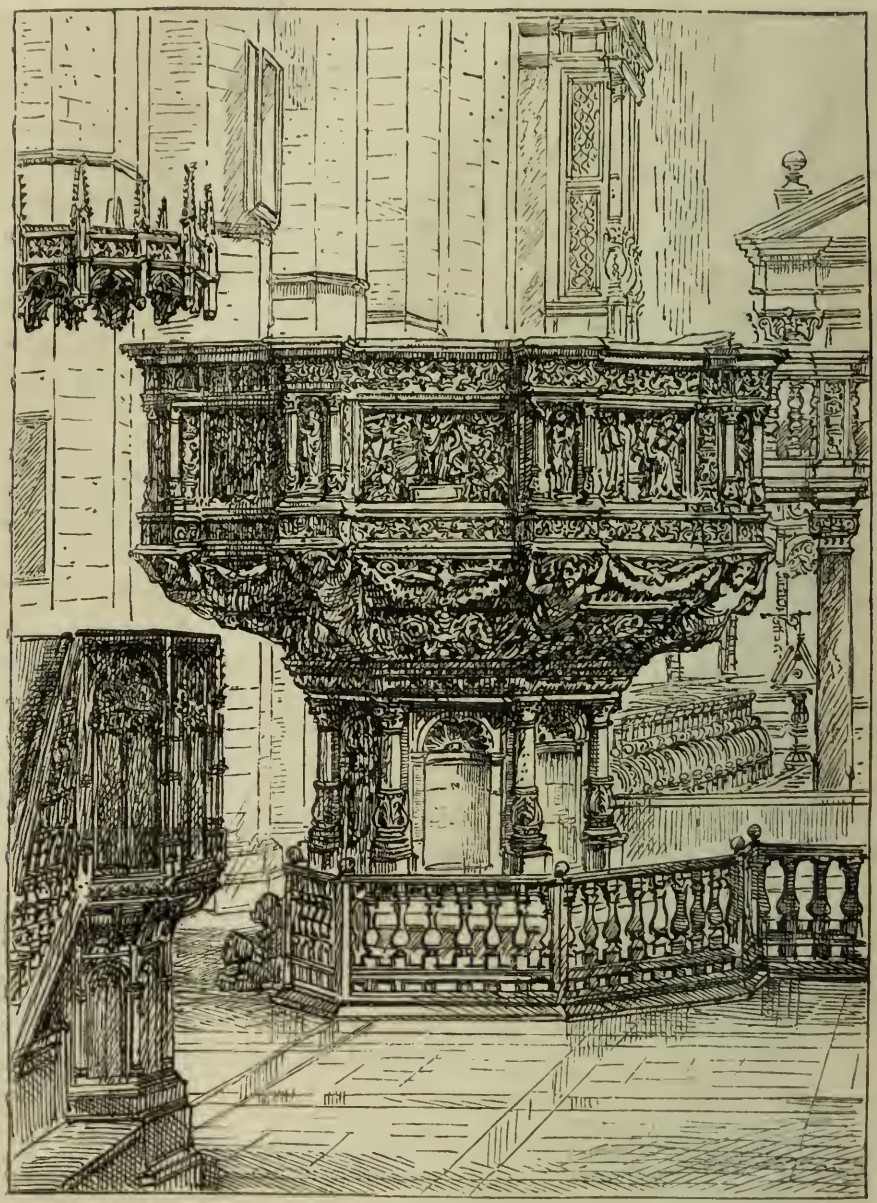
Early next morning came a telegram from Mr. A. in England, one clause of which rejoiced my heart. It was this: "Doctor and nurse starting. Will reach Barcelona on Sunday morning."

I could have sung for joy. It was the very thing I had desired. A.'s condition seemed to grow more and more critical, but if we could only keep life in him until the arrival of the doctor, he would probably, humanly speaking, be saved.

But how pass those days of suspense? And almost the worst trial was the fact that the doctor would arrive at Barcelona on Sunday morning, whilst the boat would not leave for Palma until Monday afternoon. What hours of inaction, what an anxious, interminable waiting would be his!

But that I was there to help to nurse A., I should now have felt

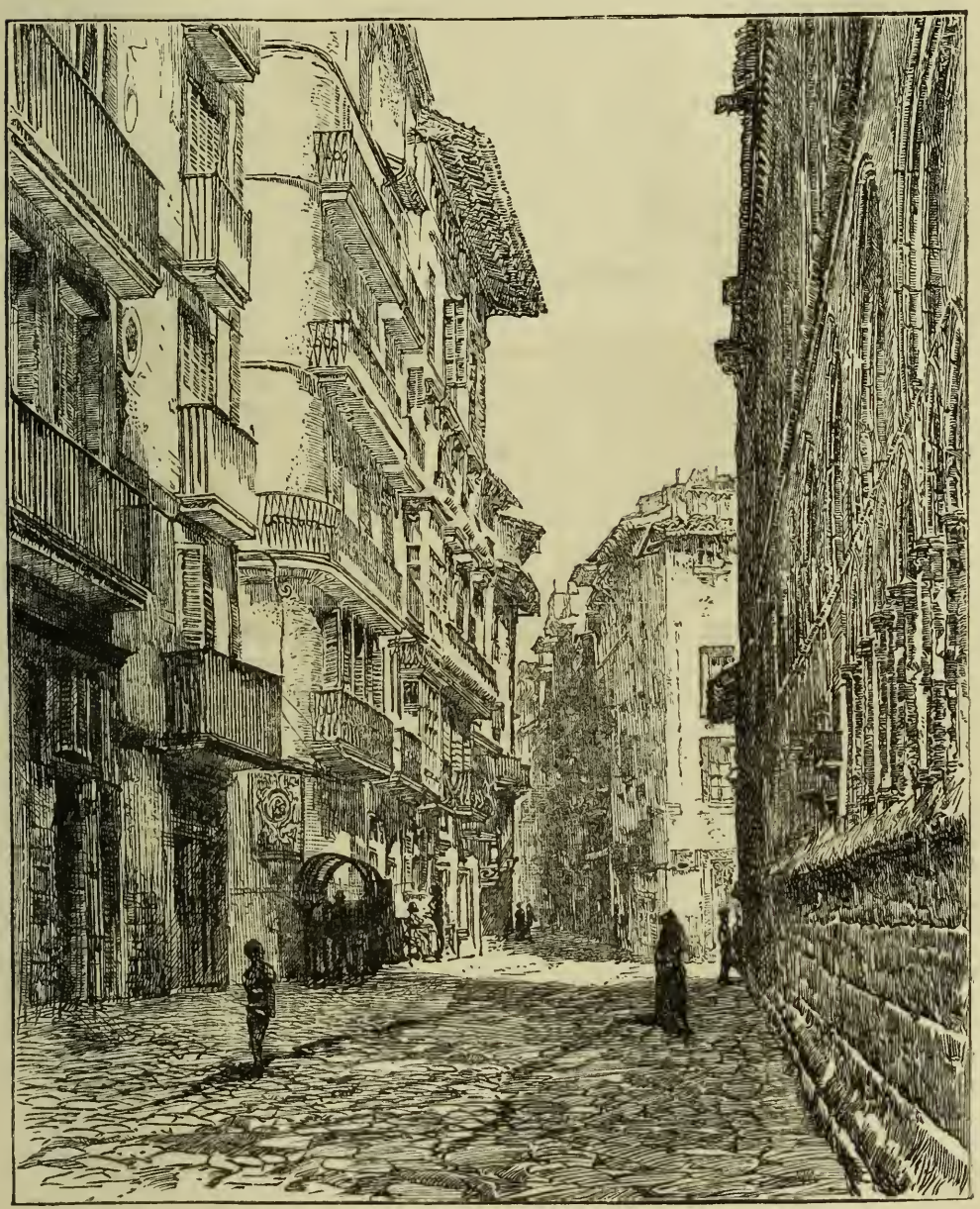
very much like Othello. Half the pleasure and profit of my second visit to Mallorca was at an end. Instead of exploring and becoming familiar with every inch of the ground, the remainder of my sojourn must be spent in Palma.



PULPIT, PALMA CATHEDRAL.

For it was impossible to leave A. under present circumstances. It is not pleasant, moreover, to go about alone. There is no truer proverb than "Never less alone than when alone," but those are times and seasons when snugly buried in one's study, surrounded by cherished books, those companions which never disappoint us. They give us all we need, and exactly as we want it. Reciprocity is perfect.

The look we search for in a friend and find not; the word we expect that comes not; the look and the word that do come, but in the wrong place; the way in which in consequence we are thrown back upon ourselves—nothing of this do we find in our books



STREET IN PALMA.

Then the solitude of that great palace which I now inhabit! Throughout the dark hours of the night I am absolutely alone.

It is a new experience. Night after night I let myself in with a latchkey, by no means as small as one of Chubb's patents, grope through the dark rooms until I reach the spot where Catalina has left lamp and matches, and throw some light upon the scene.

For Catalina, of course, as usual, returns home to her husband and children when her daily duties are over. Her present work is light enough. All she has to do is to let herself in with a latchkey in a morning, prepare my water, spread my sumptuous breakfast of tea and ensaimada, and make me a supply of lemonade for my return at night. After that she is at liberty to depart.

I light my lamp, and the rooms become only the more solitary and abandoned. Ghostly reflections are cast upon the walls; I start at my own shadow. A recollection comes upon me of days when, with A.'s companionship, the rooms were charming, and the hours passed laughingly. A vision of a sick form at the Consulate, tossing about in delirium, while those who look on are racked by anxiety, comes to me in painful and violent contrast. It is very much a case of looking on this picture and on that: "of the days that are no more."

Under present circumstances, I ask, Will they ever come again? In spite of never giving up hope—and I will not give it up—in the small hours of the night things wear their most melancholy appearance: one's nerves are strung to that tension which reaches the point of foreboding, and shows Destiny at her worst.

I return at different hours. Sometimes it is not much past midnight; sometimes it is past two in the morning.

The palace has now changed its name to the Dungeon. The midnight or early morning walk from the Consulate to the dungeon is a sad one. All Palma is asleep. The streets are solitary; the stars are brilliant, but too far away to yield any sense of companionship. I hear nothing but the echo of my footsteps, nothing but the mournful note of some poor quail. Every now and then a screech owl passes over the silent town, with a cry full of omen. I shudder as I hear it. There is the distant call of a watchman, proclaiming the hour and the night. It feels like the end of all things.

On the steps of the church I have to pass, I invariably find another watchman sitting down and resting. Sometimes there are two of them. Their lanterns are beside them, and throw little gleams and glooms about. At first they would look at me suspiciously, but they have now grown familiar with my appearance and nightly walk. In return for my Buenas noches, they throw me a cordial "Buenas noches, señor!" They look at each other and wonder where I have come from and whither I go. No doubt they suspect an affair of gallantry; for Palma would not be of the South without its Romeos and Juliets. The pastoral days of simple Phyllis and Corydon I fear have departed. Serenades you do not often hear here, but love vows and passionate protestations are common enough.

I have seen a faithful swain, brimming over with fond emotion, apostrophising the half-open shutter above a glorious bit of trellis work; tall, straight, his hands clasped, his long hair thrown back in poetical impassioned ecstasy. In passing, the shutter has been gently

but cruelly closed, so that the fair and frail one behind is hidden. Not for me is a view of her sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks. At sound of my receding footsteps, the shutter has been gently opened again. How do I know? Why, I have basely looked back. And perhaps I have wished that I—— But no; I have wished nothing but constancy to the vows of this Romeo and Juliet, with whom I have no concern.

This has been at ten o'clock, and at two in the morning I have again come upon the same scene, with a slight difference of attitude. The actors are the same. Four hours of rapture and rhapsody; four hours of devotion; four hours of Paradise. Romeo is now upon his knees, making his last fond protest of eternal fidelity, promising to be there the next night at the same hour. His attitude may be somewhat ridiculous, but it is romantic.

In this last moment of agonised parting, they are absorbed in each other, and neither hear my footsteps nor see my shadow upon the wall. I might be a ghost, and as I pass I have full view of Juliet. Truly she is lovely, with raven hair and glowing features, and large, dark, flashing eyes. My night's rest will be disturbed. Who would not fall in love with her? Who would not envy that Romeo? If I were a Southerner I should stab him dead, and take his place. Being a Northerner, I only feel that I should like to do it. I don't do it.

But my rest is disturbed by very different things from visions of Romeos and Juliets. I retire in the silence of my dungeon. I put out my lamp, and to silence is added darkness. But the silence is soon broken by the hum and buzz of mosquitoes, that scourge of the South. I throw a handkerchief over my face, and dream that I am suffocating. I bury my head in the bedclothes, and dream that I am one of the Princes in the Tower, despatched by a cruel uncle, and I wake to find myself plunging out of bed, fighting an imaginary enemy. Dreams evidently go by contraries. In my dream I am punishing the adversary terribly, getting the best of him. Can you fancy this of me in broad daylight or in reality? Finally I give in to the mosquitoes, and make the best of restless and disturbed nights.

But I have voluntarily chosen my lot, as far as the dungeon is concerned.

Mr. Mark invited me to take up my abode at the Consulate, an offer I really could not accept. He was already overburdened. On the arrival of the doctor and the nurse from England he would simply be in the midst of a congregation. Mr. and Mrs. Bateman, with a kindness and hospitality I cannot describe to you, have pressed me to go up to Il Tereno and stay with them. This also I felt I could not do. It was too far from A., for whom I am constantly anxious, and near whom I wish to be. It is difficult to leave the Consulate, even in the small hours of the morning. Then again, my sister, the immediate past has unfitted me for social calls upon mind and attention. The slightest strain brings on a prostration which ends

in something beyond stupidity: and so with what should I repay the goodness that is here offered me?

Therefore I have kept to the dungeon, and these hours of solitude have a certain compensation in them.

Nevertheless, I am much at Il Tereno, sometimes taking luncheon, sometimes dining with Mr. and Mrs. Bateman. This short change is very different from altogether taking up one's abode in a house, and makes less calls upon one's nervous system. Without this pleasant social intercourse I don't quite know how I should go on at all. Suspense, the passing hours, the presence of danger, the fear of what may be—all this would become overwhelming.

After luncheon we repair to the balcony, and scarcely could Paradise itself have a fairer view. At our feet is the garden—not of Eden, but of Il Tereno—beautiful with flowers and overshadowing branches, conspicuous amongst them the ever-graceful pepper tree, with its perfect form and small, quivering foliage.

The Mediterranean is spread out before us, blue and shimmering, a beauty not to be described. It forms the Bay of Palma: one of the loveliest bays in the world. The land rounds in a far-reaching semicircle. Palma, across the bay, is another vision of beauty—an Eastern vision; its white houses glowing in the intense sunlight. Above all rises majestically the Cathedral, its wonderful amber tone in distinct contrast with the whiteness of the town. Beyond this stretch the windmills; and, again beyond, the far off curves of the land, with their wooded slopes. From this point we have a wonderful view of the hills surrounding Palma; a grand, uninterrupted chain, Mallorca's pride and beauty. The busy life of the harbour is visible, with its crowd of shipping. White-winged boats flit about like birds disporting themselves upon the deep.

We can plainly see the Consulate from here, and wonder what is going on behind those closed venetians; how fares the patient.

At night the scene changes.

It is almost more dreamy and poetical. The great heat of the day is over. The sun went down, leaving behind him a gorgeous colouring, which has gradually faded into darkness. You cannot imagine these sunsets, their ever changing effects, without seeing them. You make up your mind that great as are the glories of earth, the glories of the sky are greater.

Within the house shaded lamps throw a subdued light over the rooms, giving one a picture of home life—English home life—a feeling of infinite repose. Without, the last sunset effect is over, darkness has fallen. The stars come out with intense brilliancy; the moon sails up and asserts her right as Queen of Night. She throws her light upon the distant cathedral and its majestic outlines. The town is distinguished only by its lamps—stars of earth. The waters of the great sea are invisible, but we know they are there, and feel their influence. Lights gleam here and there upon its surface from

Mr. Easton's ghost.

fishing boats. Some of them have a curious way of fixing two lights under their bows, which throw out long reflections. They look like monsters of the deep, with fiery eyes, going forth to vengeance. These are supposed to attract the fish, who, like the poor moths of the air, come forward at its bidding and find their doom.

The night is intensely still. The cool breeze that blows, the repose of the scene and hour, fill one with a delicious sense of the luxury of a Southern influence and atmosphere. Every now and then the cry of a screech owl on the wooded slopes of Bellver startles the air. A growl from Don Negro tells us that next to cats, screech owls are his pet aversion. He comes up and wags his tail, pays each of us a visit in turn, and asks permission to go off and hunt the owl.

It is not given. Instead of this, he receives a saucerful of coffee with a lump of sugar in it. He declares that it is better than Persian coffee; that no Turk was ever so fond of it as he; no dog was ever yet served with hands so fair. Happy dog, whose lines are cast in pleasant places! Indulged and spoilt to his heart's content, even to taking his coffee out of saucers of delicate and refined china. But then he is a refined dog, as behoves a dog brought up in a refined atmosphere. This refinement of life is one of the things in life we could not do without, any more than Don Negro.

At about half-past nine I leave all these charming influences, and take my solitary walk back to Palma. The walk under the stars is delicious. Few people disturb the impression of the scene. Mr. Bateman and Don Negro always accompany me to the commencement of the high road. Then we part, and Don Negro looks up, and grows perplexed and distressed with a wonder as to which he shall follow. It ends in his stirring up a perfect whirlwind of dust, and in his scampering back in obedience to an already far-off whistle.

I go my way under the night sky. Everything bears the silence of night, which is so like death. The travelling stars are glorious. I have told you before how infinitely larger they are than the stars of our insular skies. But they are so far off, so silent, so mysterious, that whilst admiring one almost shudders at them. They are so strange a type of the infinite and the eternal. The space they occupy seems so illimitable that we ask ourselves whither the soul wings its flight to the everlasting regions? Where are they?

The note of the screech owl every now and then breaks upon the air like a bird of doom. It is a wicked cry. No wonder Don Negro would like to put an end to it.

It takes about half an hour to reach the Consulate. Once within the town I have the companionship of the houses and the port. The shipping in the harbour is quiet. There is very little stirring. Now and then a voice is raised in some vessel, a snatch of an old song, hushed as soon as begun. Some sailor returning probably half seas

over. I think I may venture upon the expression in a case so apropos. Here and there a small fishing boat, with its strange lamps under its bows, looks like a fiery monster. The cathedral stands out in all its solemn, sable outlines; beautiful at all times, portentous at night. The interior must be dark and full of shadows; almost invisible shadows that might be revenants. I like the French word, for which we have no English equivalent. *Comers again? Returners?* How translate it? We have no term sufficiently expressive.

I should like to creep inside that building to-night and wander solitarily about its immense space; wander about the arches and the pillars and raise the ghosts of departed memories if I could not find any real ghosts to consort with. But no doubt real ghosts are there; and I would ask them why they return; what unrest brings them back from the unseen; what they do in the unseen; what their life, their condition, their state of being. But ghosts are vexatious things; and as far as I ever heard, never speak when spoken to. This is ill-bred, to say the least of it. If they can return and assume their old form, why not the voice also, giving us a reason for such supernatural visitations?

And as I am on the topic, let me tell you a ghost story that I heard from Mr. Easton some time before leaving England. It happened to himself and he vouches for its reality.

He had gone down to T—— Hall, in Cheshire, to paint a miniature. It was the month of July, and many visitors were there. He found himself at night in a large and magnificent chamber, with rich oak ceilings and panelled walls that dated back to the days of Elizabeth of England. In those days, or before them, it had been the Roman Catholic oratory of the house. Large mullioned windows with deep casements adorned the room, which looked towards the east. An immense four-post bedstead, almost as old as the room itself, scarcely filled up any space in the large apartment. It was the very room to delight an artist.

Mr. Easton retired to bed and went to sleep. Between three and four o'clock in the morning he was suddenly awakened; not by any sound, not by nightmare, but by some unconscious influence not to be described.

To his astonishment, he beheld a female form in the room. This, of course, fully aroused him. He thought it was an error; half rose on his pillow. "Madam," he said, "you have made a mistake; you have come into the wrong room."

No notice was taken of his remark. The lady might have been deaf and dumb; blind also. Then he noticed how altogether strange was her appearance. Dawn was breaking; the stars were dying out, the crescent moon was rising in the east.

This midnight, or morning intruder, was dressed in the fashion of the last century: a mob cap; a sacque reaching from her shoulders to

her feet and trailing the floor, just as you see them in the old pictures. She looked old and haggard. Her face was a picture of horror and unutterable misery and remorse; her mouth was open, and showed her long, fang-like teeth; her eyes were starting from their sockets, as in one who sees a vision of utmost terror. She was wringing her hands in the abandonment of hopeless despair; long, bony hands, with skeleton-like fingers. She was pacing wildly past the bedstead from end to end of the room, a ceaseless march. Her footsteps were inaudible; the rustling of her silk sacque could not be heard. Absolute ghostly silence.

This went on for many minutes, until suddenly, Mr. Easton knew not how or why, the figure mysteriously disappeared; the room was empty.

What did it mean? He made up his mind that it must be a trick some foolish person had played him in the hope of frightening him. It should not occur again.

He said nothing about it that day, but the next night he carefully locked his bedroom door. He had sounded the panelling in the morning, and as far as he could tell there was neither secret door nor any other entrance to the chamber. He went to bed, placing paper and pencil by his side. "If the lady comes again," he said to himself, "I'll sketch her."

He went to sleep, and again was awakened precisely as he had been the night before. An exact repetition of everything took place. He began to sketch. Fancy sketching a ghost! Did ever anyone have nerve for it before? Did ever anyone have the opportunity? Was ever anyone placed in such a position?

Again, at the end of some minutes, the mysterious visitant disappeared, evaporated, dissolved; he could not tell how.

This went on for ten days. Mr. Easton's work in the house was ended; his visit came to a conclusion. He had said nothing about the ghost; but on the last morning he related to his host and hostess what had happened.

"Yes," they replied, "we had to put you in the haunted room. The house was full when you came down; no other room was at liberty. It has been a great trouble to us. We cannot even get servants to remain with us. The ghost appears at this time of the year, every year, for about a fortnight, and always in the same room. Not everyone sees it, and as you said nothing about it, we concluded you were one of the greater number of those who do not see ghosts. You must have a wonderful nerve. The last one to see it last summer was the son of Baron P. One night was enough for him; he would not risk a second, and departed summarily the next day, almost as pale as the ghost itself."

"Who is the ghost supposed to be?" asked Mr. Easton.

"It is the ghost of a very wicked woman, who lived in the last century. She led a dreadful life. Smothered the heir to the property,

a little fellow of five years old, in order that she might herself enjoy a longer reign. She was often dragged from the gaming table and put to bed by her servants. And she finally died in that very room in the greatest agony of remorse and terror."

Then Mr. Easton brought out his sketch. Both his hearers exclaimed. "It is very strange, but if you had taken this sketch from a portrait of the old woman as it exists in another house, you could not have made it a more perfect resemblance in the outline of the features."

Mr. Easton took his departure, and carried his sketch with him. From this he made a small painting, which he gave to me. I have never ventured to show it to you, but will do so on my return to England, if you wish it.

There is a short sequel to the story. Soon after Mr. Easton's visit, the family of T—— Hall went abroad, and let the place for five years. The new people were so disturbed by the first appearance of the ghost at its appointed season, that they wrote to the owner of the hall, asking permission to have the room done away with. This was accorded. All the beautiful oak panelling that had not been disturbed for centuries was dismantled and taken out, the room was bricked up and separated from the rest of the house, and if the ghost still walks it has no longer the chance of disturbing anyone's rest. Yet I think it was a barbarous proceeding. For my part, I would have run the risk of fifty ghosts rather than lose that grand old room.

To return to Palma and present scenes.

It was the cathedral that put ghosts into my head. If they walk in one place, why not in another? In my nightly walks I often feel that I should like to be amongst them in that immense space. Should like to go to the sarcophagus of Don Jaime, pull out the slide, and ask him to get up in his gorgeous robes and hold a levee. Should like to find my way to the organ loft, and through those dark aisles and arches send forth strains of melody floating through the silent arches, vibrating, whispering, trembling: the thunder of the deep diapason, the breathing of the voix céleste. How one would be inspired! How music would flow unconsciously from the depths of one's heart and soul; until the moments flew past, and the distant cock crew, and the dawn broke in the east. And then the ghosts, spell-bound all this time, and listening in motionless array, would speed back to their niches and their doom.

About ten o'clock I reach the Consulate. Mr. Mark is there, and our conversation always has the same beginning. He is very desponding; evidently is not gifted constitutionally with a large share of hope. There is a ghostly figure in the sick room. A sister of mercy bends over him with gentle touch and soothing influence. But they know absolutely nothing about nursing, good and willing as they are, these sisters.

A., with the capriciousness of delirium, has taken a great fancy to

one of the two sisters, an equal dislike to the other. The favoured sister and I are the only two who have any influence with him. From the beginning, whenever I go into the room, he calms down and will do anything I bid him. He will not do anything for any one else's bidding, Sister Cecilia excepted.

She is very nice ; very soft and gentle in her ways. Her voice is clear and soothing. In her nun-like dress she is very picturesque. The expression of her face is calm, resigned and holy. She smiles not seldom, but almost seems to apologise for doing so ; as if it were too worldly an indulgence. The crucifix upon her breast seems to recall her to her vows. The rosary at her side rattles as if touched by an invisible, admonitory hand. A. in his delirium has expressed himself sensible of her charm.

Sister Cecilia.

Yet the first afternoon Mrs. Bateman came to see him, it was strange how quickly he discerned the difference ; the element of refinement, the touch which only a gentlewoman possesses. He kissed her hand with reverence ; the homage he might have given to the Queen at a Drawing-room. Then a sudden thought seemed to strike him. He turned to the Sister, and wished to kiss her hand also. She drew back, and touched her rosary.

"Allow him to do so," said Mrs. Bateman sensibly. "He is unconscious, and does not know what he is about. To thwart him is to irritate him."

As she pointed to the cross on her breast, A. started and looked at Mrs. Bateman. "What does she mean?" he asked. "Has she taken vows like the nuns?"

"Yes."

"Then won't she be allowed to marry?"

"No."

"But that would be a life sacrificed. Do you think if the Pope were paid a large sum he would grant her a dispensation?"

"I daresay he would," replied Mrs. Bateman. "We will see about it when you are better."

"But I am not better. I shall never be better. These doctors have entered into a conspiracy to kill me."

"Oh, no," I put in; "as long as I am here they shall not harm you."

"You promise me that, my dear W.? You won't let them have their own way? Half the stuff they give me is poisoned. You are the only one I have to trust to."

I give the required promise, and he rests upon it perfectly contented. Mrs. Bateman has brought him some lovely flowers, and he almost worships them. They have to be arranged in vases, a long row of them, and placed where he can see them easily.

On Saturday Dr. N. gave me a great shock.

"How is he?" I asked, when he had left the sick room.

"Very, very ill; could not be worse."

"Is there very great danger?"

"The greatest. He can scarcely be here to-morrow."

"Can nothing be done? No change of treatment? More nourishment? He must be sinking from exhaustion."

Dr. N. shook his head.

"More nourishment would kill him outright. Typhoid is now strongly declared. But," laying his hand upon my shoulder, "you look only fit to be nursed yourself. In your anxiety be careful that you do not take it also. We should have two invalids on our hands instead of one."

"That you will have very soon as it is," I remarked. "I am certain that James is going to have it. No one pays any attention to poor James, but he is ill."

Rumour of the illness has gone abroad, of course, and the whole town now shuns the Consulate. They have a fixed idea here that typhoid fever is infectious. Nothing will persuade them to the contrary. The lady below has strewed her staircase and floors with scented herbs and aromatic leaves as a sort of safeguard or charm against danger.

Perhaps it is not altogether their fault. The doctors themselves declare in favour of infection. Even the Archduke, whom I met to-day in the streets of Palma, said it was better to be on the safe side. At any rate, we are delivered from everlasting callers and enquiries, which would drive poor Barbara out of her mind. As it is, the door has to be answered incessantly, either for doctors, or medicine, or ourselves, or the fruits of the earth, or something else.

Barbara is inimitable. I have taken the greatest fancy for Barbara. Do not be alarmed. She will never see sixty again, and she is not beautiful. She has a grown-up son, too, as old as I am. Barbara

is dark in appearance—the swarthy skin and the black eyes of the South. Her voice is not melodious; it is hard, metallic, downright. She speaks rapidly when she speaks at all, which is seldom. Very often when you expect an answer you receive a gesture. The gesture is perfect. It contains, not a sentence, but a whole page of reply.

She is extremely independent in expression, in manner, in answer. She looks at you out of her dark eyes with slightly drooping lids. Her face is impenetrable, firm as a rock. The woman has a mind and a will. No limp disposition has taken her through the world. She is wood that will bear carving, having her own will, going her own way. But hard as she looks, you are quite sure that way is a good one. She is honest as the day. Only, if she takes a dislike to you, or takes up a mistaken opinion, the Pope himself would not turn her.

And yet she is dévote to some extent. Early every morning, when the bells of Palma are having their wild fling, off goes Barbara to the cathedral, says her prayers and tells her beads upon the cold stones, and crosses herself when it is all over, and goes straight off to market. There, faithful to the interests of her master, she makes impossible bargains, and brings home rare triumphs of good taste. Barbara is not going to be imposed upon. Not she.

I never regret my ignorance of Mallorcan so much as when I am with Barbara. There is a depth of dry humour in her only waiting to flash forth for anyone who will take the trouble to stir the waters. Her expression betrays its existence, her very gestures, the very tone of her voice. I call her Santa Barbara, and she intimates that the opposite extreme would be nearer the truth. And I am not sure that to some, on provocation, she might not show signs of the cloven foot.

But I am in her good books; she has taken me into favour. When she opens the door to me in a morning, she condescends to smile, and looks as if she would deign to honour me with a motherly embrace. Fortunately for me, she never puts this into operation. I know I should submit, for she has power in her hands, and you must not offend your friend at court.

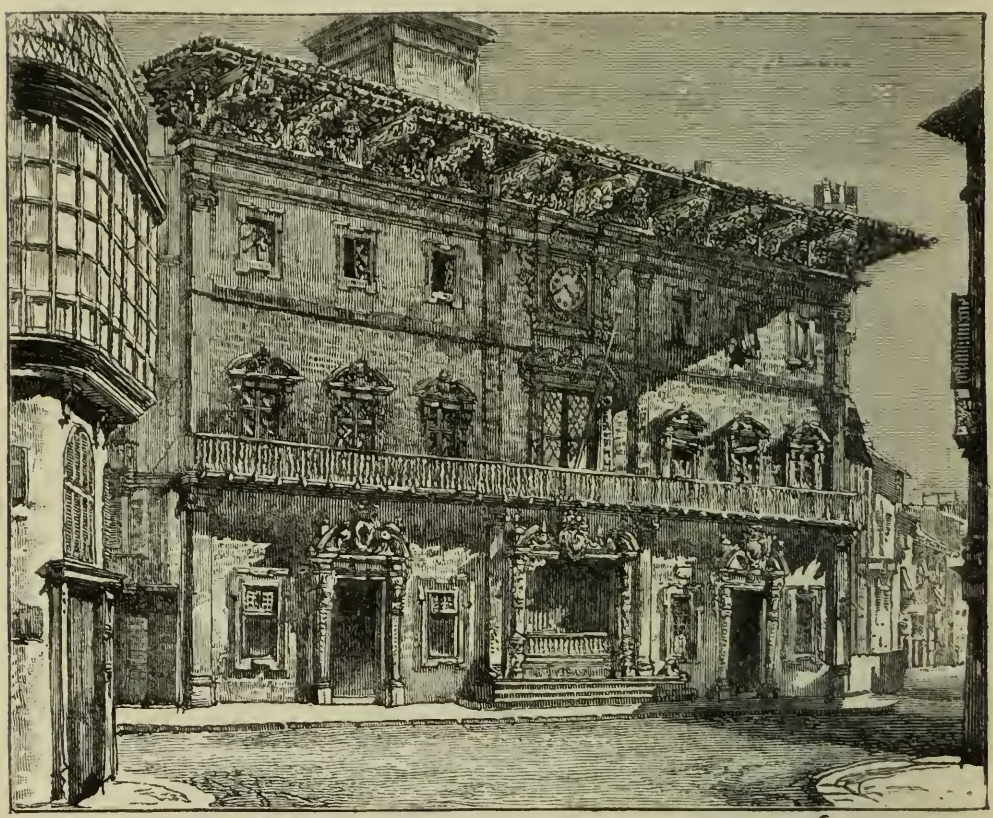
She admits me into her kitchen and all its mysteries. It is really a picture of beauty and order. She has small respect for the doctors, and seems to think that her kitchen stuff would do much more for the invalid than their outrageous physic. I believe she is right.

Barbara is sensible; she is gifted with insight and instinct. She is one of those rare people who can do the right thing without reflection. Nevertheless, it is plain to see that all this trouble has very much thrown her off her balance. The lines of her life are disturbed. They have hitherto run in calm and even places; they are now in revolution. There is a brooding look about her. She yields to the inevitable, but not without a protest. Why is this thus? and why has she to bear this burden of sickness, through a mere acci-

dent? When she goes off in a morning to tell her beads, I wonder whether she is quite as fervent as usual in her devotions?

For all that, if a barefooted pilgrimage would restore the sick, I do not think she would hesitate to take it.

I cannot tell you how the hours and the days have dragged their slow lengths away. Sunday came to an end, and Dr. N.'s gloomy anticipations were not fulfilled. A. seemed to remain in much the same condition. Serious and dangerous; but I would not admit it that it was hopeless. The boat from Barcelona was due on Tuesday



Town Hall, Palma.

morning at four o'clock. Someone must meet it, and I undertook to do so. Anything to be in action. As the hours approached I could not rest. One never knew what might happen from one hour to the other. It was a race with time; it might be a race with death.

On the Monday evening Mr. Bateman very kindly suggested that I should go up to Il Tereno and sleep there. From the roof of his house the boat could be seen approaching from the distance. His servants should watch, and when in sight there would be time to dress, go into Palma, and reach the boat before it was alongside. A carriage should be ordered to come up at a quarter to four.

So it came to pass. After dinner we sat out upon the balcony, with all the scenes, effect, and influence I have described to you.

Afar off we could see lights glimmering in the Consulate, and I feel sure that many a prayer went up to speed the approaching vessel, which we trusted was bearing light and healing upon its wings. The stars above whispered of power, of calmness and eternal repose, but gave one no consolation. The screech owl sent forth its desolate cry. Lights flashed upon the dark waters.

Worn and wearied, I retired early, but not to rest. Sleep would not come, the eyelids refused to close. The night passed in anxious pacings. I threw open the venetians. What was going on in that chamber across the bay? Good or ill, life or death? We all have these thoughts, this restlessness, when a long-looked-for hour is approaching; an hour of vital decision. Hope that has resolutely sustained us seems to grow weak and faint at the moment that it should really become strong with fresh life.

I watched the day break and light gradually spread her mantle. It was a marvellous sight, if one could only have felt in sympathy with it. At three o'clock I heard a sound, and looking out saw Mr. Bateman upon the terrace and Don Negro lying upon the steps leading to the garden. The dog knew as well as possible that something out of one's ordinary life was taking place.

At a quarter to four up rattled Enrico with his carriage, and almost simultaneously with it came word that the boat was in sight. I was quite ready. We rattled down to the port, and the vessel was approaching the harbour as we reached the stone pier. On the bridge I discerned the well-known costume of an English nurse, and beside her one that I knew must be the doctor. You can imagine my sensations. I thought the steamer would never come to an anchor. It always takes an interminable time to do this, but to-day it seemed an eternity. Then the doctor landed. Then came a nervous hand-clasp as if we had known each other for a hundred years. Then the question:

"Is all well?"

And the answer:

"It must be well, now that you are here."

And yet, my sister, "L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose."

THE CAPTAIN'S CHARGE.

By Lieut.-Colonel Mahony, C.M.G.

Extract from District Orders,
Pietermaritzburg, May 10th, 1879.

"CAPTAIN ELLICOTT, 94th Regiment, will report himself without delay to Major Manley, Chief Paymaster, in order to receive instructions that will be conveyed to him by that officer."

In obedience to the foregoing, I presented myself at the head office of the Army Pay Department, and requested to be shown to Major Manley's room.

"Good morning, sir," I said on being admitted. "I am directed to report myself to you."

"Yes, Ellicott," answered the ever-cheery chief, who had always kindly words of advice and encouragement to offer those who served under his orders. "I am about to detail you for a difficult and somewhat dangerous duty. Money must be conveyed to Newcastle for the payment of supplies, as the Boers refuse to receive our paper; and even if the drafts were accepted there is not sufficient specie in the small up-country banks to meet all the demands that would be made upon them. So I want to send you up with fifty thousand pounds in gold to be handed over to Mr. Martin, now in Commissariat charge at Newcastle, who will account to me direct for all payments made."

"Am I not to have the usual escort detailed in the Treasury Instructions?" I asked.

"No; there's the pinch. Our losses were so great at Isandhlwana that we have not a single man to spare. All clerks and employed men must take their turn of duty. Besides, I wish to avoid an escort, as it would only have the effect of unnecessarily advertising the matter. In the present state of the country, with shoals of doubtful characters about, this would be injudicious and almost invite attack. So the General has fallen in with my suggestion as to the manner of conveyance, I taking the responsibility of its safe delivery. Now listen." And he proceeded to unfold his plan.

The position appeared to be this: After our losses on the 22nd January, and while waiting for reinforcements, there were barely enough men to enable us to hold our own in case of a descent upon the Colony by Cetewayo. Pietermaritzburg had been put in a state of defence by erecting loopholed barricades in the streets. The court-house was fortified and laagers formed at various strategic points, to which all the inhabitants were to repair upon a given signal—the firing of three guns in quick succession from Fort Napier. All the

outlying posts and towns were also strongly fortified. This prohibited the withdrawal of any men employed in the duties of defence.

Ordinarily a guard of one officer and twenty-five men is provided for the escort of treasure; but, as has been explained, the present circumstances were unfavourable to this course, and prompt payment for supplies being imperative, the following was decided on.

The money was to be packed in empty ammunition boxes, with the usual descriptive label of contents remaining on them. Then it was to be loaded in an ordinary Cape cart (a marvel of lightness and strength) and placed under charge of an officer, who, he was pleased to say, should be a man of courage and resource; passing it on to the front, as was frequently done at the time, as ammunition. There was a great scarcity of stores of all kinds after our losses at Isandhlwana, where immense quantities of supplies had to be abandoned.

"Now," he went on to say, "the greatest risk you will run is from the swarm of men who, under the guise of somebody's 'Horse,' or somebody else's 'Rangers,' et hoc genus omne, are spread over the country at the present time. I don't allude to the gallant men under tried leaders who have done such good and loyal service, but to those smaller bands under unknown men, to which are attracted the usual lawless spirits that always crop up under pressure of times like the present. Should you come across any of these, they would make nothing of taking your life if they got an inkling of what you have in charge."

This was true enough.

"Now, Captain Ellicott, do you feel equal to the risk?" continued Major Manley. My spirits rose at the prospect. The task was no doubt a difficult one, but I reflected that this was a chance that might never come in my way again, and I felt a not unpardonable pride in the hope of obtaining a little distinction should I successfully carry out the duty now entrusted to me.

"I am your man, Major," I replied. "When am I to start?"

"Good," he said, grasping my hand. "Your ready acceptance of what, to be plain with you, is a hazardous undertaking, shall not go unrepresented in the proper quarter."

In order to throw the loafer element off the scent, a paragraph was inserted in the *Natal Witness*, stating that Captain Ellicott, of the 94th Regiment, was in orders to join the headquarters of his corps, and take with him a supply of reserve ammunition, the Transport Department being directed to provide conveyance.

The date of leaving was given as some days after that intended for my actual departure; consequently I should be well on the way before it was known that I had started.

Two days after the interview mentioned above, the cart containing my valuable consignment wound slowly upwards along the miles of steep hill leading to Howick. The Hottentot driver grumbled now and then at the weight of the ammunition, saying it ought to be

sent on an ox-waggon instead of a mule-cart. He was afraid the springs would not hold out. I soothed him, however, with an occasional draught of Boer brandy, with which I had provided myself —that fiery liquid so highly prized by his class, upon whose head it appeared to make not the slightest impression. After a long and wearisome crawl upward, we reached at length the comparatively level road which terminated at the hotel.

I was disagreeably surprised, on arrival, to find here a body of volunteers, about forty in number; composed principally, as it appeared to me, of that dubious class known as the "canteen loafer," a product peculiar to some parts of South Africa. They were under the leadership of a smooth-tongued individual named Osierton, whom I had frequently met at Pietermaritzburg, and who was said to be very well connected—a reckless gambler, ready to bet on anything or everything, having the additional reputation of being an utterly unscrupulous scoundrel.

His second in command was a drunken, quarrelsome ruffian named Mondrum, who had been forbidden the entrée to any decent hotel where he was known, and was strongly suspected of being concerned in a robbery committed at a farmhouse on the Mooi River some months previously. His knowledge of the Zulu language (he having lived among the natives for several years) was the recommendation for the post he held.

On my requesting Mrs. Padley, the landlady, to oblige me with a separate room in which to deposit the ammunition, she became alarmed and refused to allow it to enter the house.

"No, sir," she said. "I have had trouble enough already with these men. They have been hanging about the place for nearly a week, and I am afraid if I admit your ammunition, they will set fire to something and blow us all to pieces. It had better remain outside."

This was an unexpected rebuff, and all I could urge would not make her alter her decision. So with many misgivings I piled the boxes in front of a little turret room at the end of the verandah that had been allotted to me as a sleeping place.

This band of volunteers, or what many persons would be inclined to style bandits, kept up their revels to a late hour, and then dropped off, one by one, to seek some place inside or outside the house to sleep away the effects of their orgie.

I tried to ascertain from Osierton where he was bound to, and when he intended to march, being desirous of giving him and his men a wide berth. He smiled furtively, and replied in his smooth, almost musical voice: "Really, Captain, I am not quite sure yet. I was detailed by General Clifford to proceed to Harrismith; but I understand that that has now been changed, and I am waiting here for orders. Where might you be going?"

I thought it well to conceal my destination, and said:

"Oh! I'm for the Bushman's River, at Weston."

"The Bushman's River? Why the mounted police are there! They have plenty of ammunition, I know. Major Dartnell, their commandant, told me so."

"Yes, of course," I replied. "But this that I have is intended for distribution to any detached posts that may be in need of it; and Weston is centrally situated."

This conversation took place in the verandah outside my room, in the vicinity of the boxes. Mondrum coming out of the hotel at the moment with a pipe in his mouth, reeled up to where he heard voices.

"What's up?" he demanded. "Who says we're to move on? Devilish unlikely, with comfortable quarters and five bob a day for doing nothing. Time enough to do the fighting when it comes."

"I vote for staying here and holding the laager." A laager adjacent to, and partly joining the hotel, had just been completed by the neighbouring farmers, as a place of retreat should an attack be made. "What do you say, Commandant?" he inquired, addressing Osierton, and seating himself on the boxes.

"Don't smoke over the ammunition," I said. "One doesn't know how a spark might reach it."

"Let it go off, then," he answered with an ugly word, kicking at the pile and dislodging one of the boxes, which fell to the ground.

"Hullo!" he cried. "It jingles like coin. Let us lift it up again."

This random shot made me hold my breath for a moment. Then I hurriedly stepped forward and replaced it.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," said Osierton, "to store this in the laager, and there we would have it snug, in case of a visit from Dabulamanzi. I hear he was seen at Veldtman's Drift yesterday."

"I couldn't allow it to leave my charge," I returned, "until it is handed over to the officer commanding at Weston. Otherwise I should get into trouble."

"Oh, we'll relieve you of all that," he cried. "This is war time, and circumstances alter cases."

The position was getting a little embarrassing, so it struck me I had better fall in with his humour, and pretend to think it might be as well to do as he suggested: merely observing that they wouldn't find it of much use, as the cartridges were for Martini-Henrys, and their arms appeared to be Sniders.

"Oh, let it go! What's the good of keeping it here?" said Mondrum. "It will only be in the way. We have plenty for our own fellows. Have you anything to drink?" he enquired, turning to me.

"Yes. I have a couple of bottles of whiskey in the cart, and shall be glad if you will join me in a glass."

This offer was met with noisy approval; and seating ourselves on the step of the hotel we proceeded to discuss the liquor. After a while I pretended to fall asleep, and they, when both bottles had been finished, were soon snoring beside me.

I rose cautiously on ascertaining that all around were deep in slumber, and went towards my room, very anxious as regarded the action I should take.

I may here mention that the money was made up at the bank in rouleaus of twenty sovereigns each, and packed tightly in the boxes. But after the last had been filled, there remained over and above about eighty sovereigns; too few to fill another box, and too bulky to fit in, made up in the same manner as the others. So they were distributed loosely over the top of the last box, and some sheets of paper pressed heavily down upon them to prevent any rolling about. To this circumstance my thoughts reverted when Mondrum spoke of the "jingle of coin;" for undoubtedly the same impression had been conveyed to my own mind when the box fell. It would be singularly unfortunate if this should be the identical box in which the loose money had been placed.

I also began to have doubts of the crafty Commandant. I had noticed him eyeing me once or twice, and I might, unknown to myself, have shown more anxiety than the occasion seemed to warrant.

I was in much perplexity as to what course I should pursue. I could do nothing openly against the gang of desperadoes that surrounded me; and if any idea dawned upon them of the real nature of my charge, nothing could save me. But I was determined not to resign it without a struggle.

Several plans suggested themselves to my mind. I thought of quietly harnessing the mules and driving back to Pietermaritzburg, taking my chance of pursuit, and waiting a more favourable opportunity. But this idea, on reflection, I abandoned, as it would be impossible to get away unobserved, and my returning without any obvious reason would give rise to comment.

I never closed my eyes during the night, and just as the grey light of dawn began to appear, I got up and looked round. Osierton and Mondrum were still lying where I had left them, and a number of others were scattered about the steep.

At this moment I heard a quiet step pass the end of the house near the laager, and was a little startled to see the dark face of an Italian named Marco Dinelli, who had been employed as a temporary clerk in the office of the Chief Paymaster. From that post he had been quietly dismissed on account of a doubtful transaction in reference to a money order sent to a soldier who was a patient in hospital; which order was cashed by Dinelli, after the man's death.

The deceased soldier's signature was suspected of being a forgery. The Italian averred, however, that he had advanced the amount of the order to the man.

The ex-clerk knew a good deal about the pay office, and the object of my journey might by some means have leaked out; so I was not without apprehension on this score.

He advanced and saluted me respectfully.

"Well, Dinelli," I said, "what are you doing here?"

"I am on my way to the front, sir," he replied. "Captain Shepstone told me some time ago, if ever I wanted employment, he would appoint me to his own troop of Natal Carbineers; and being anxious to see a little service, I thought I would remind him of his offer."

"How did you get here?" I asked.

"I came up by the post-cart on Thursday," he replied, "and was hoping some kind person would give me a lift. You don't happen to have any room, sir?"

"No," I said; "my mules have as much as they can carry already."

He glanced, I thought, curiously at the boxes, and saluting again, wished me good morning, and went towards the front of the hotel.

By this time the people of the house began to stir, and preparations for breakfast were soon in full swing.

On the appearance of this meal, I joined the motley group in the common room, for there is no distinction in a frontier hotel in South Africa; master and mistress and guests of every degree sitting down together.

I observed Dinelli and Osierton in conversation during the morning, and this did not tend to allay my fears. So I delayed proceeding onward for the present, and continued my stay at Howick, until I had time to think the matter out.

Towards mid-day I observed a mule cart bowling along the road from the direction of Pietermaritzburg. On reaching the hotel it pulled up close to where I was standing, and there stepped out an officer in uniform, whom I recognised as Dr. Mills, of the Army Medical Department.

We had met frequently at headquarters, and knowing him to be a man of some judgment and decision of character, I determined to make a confidant of him.

Having unharnessed and partaken of refreshments, he expressed a wish to see the Umgani Falls; a magnificent cascade in the immediate neighbourhood, falling from a height of over three hundred feet. The roar of its waters could be heard from where we were standing.

I hailed this opportunity of making my communication, and volunteered to accompany him.

When well out of earshot, I explained all the circumstances of my position and the doubts I entertained of Dinelli. He listened attentively.

"And now what do you suggest?" he asked, after I had ended.

My idea was this: He being on his way to Helpmakaar with a supply of medical comforts for the troops, was to permit me to exchange loads with him, allowing me to transfer the contents of his vehicle to mine while I placed the specie in his. He was then to drive on by Currie's Post and Colenso to Ladysmith, where the money could be placed in charge of the resident magistrate until my arrival.

"But how about yourself?" he asked. "If, as you seem to think, they have a suspicion of what you carry, you will be murdered to a certainty. I never saw a more cut-throat looking set of scoundrels in my life than those worthies of Osierton's Horse. Besides, how can the exchange be effected without exciting suspicion?"

"I have thought of that," I returned. "After breakfast I had a private interview with Mrs. Padley, and upon my pressing representations obtained her consent to have the boxes removed to a room at the back of the premises. A door from thence leads into the new laager, as a place of exit, should the hotel be attacked and become untenable. From that room I think I should be able after nightfall to make the necessary transfer unobserved, you causing your conveyance to be taken to the back of the house. I heard them say that Mr. Shore, of the Telegraph Department, was expected in to-night with some workmen, and as he is a jovial sort of fellow, always spending his money pretty freely, there will, no doubt, be a carouse. As regards myself," I added, "they will feel secure, having announced my intention of not starting until late to-morrow morning, two of my mules being slightly lame. This luckily happens to be the case. Should this come off all right, I will take my departure, after allowing you a good start, and if I reach Currie's Post unmolested, will remain there for the night; and on the following morning endeavour to reach Ladysmith by Bavian's Poort and the old road."

"I think the plan a risky one for you, whichever way you look at it," he observed; "but you may rely upon my co-operation."

I thanked him heartily, and remarked that his own share was not free from danger; at which he laughed.

After viewing the falls we returned to the hotel.

The advent of Mr. Shore led, as was anticipated, to a jollification, and I joined in it with apparent zest, slipping away every now and then to remove a packet from the Doctor's cart, replacing it by one of the boxes, until the exchange had been fully completed.

The next morning was an anxious one to me.

Dr. Mills, at an early hour, harnessed in a leisurely manner, stood chatting with me for a few minutes on indifferent subjects within hearing of the people about, and then drove away.

I gave a sigh of relief as I saw the mules turn round the corner that shut out the view of the house, and disappear in the scrub-lined road below.

Turning back to the hotel I encountered the Italian, in company with Osierton and Mondrum. "Well, Captain," said the latter, "when do you start? Can we help you to load the ammunition?"

"Thank you," I said coolly; "it is done already. I didn't like to trust to chance, as accidents often happen."

"Yes; it might go off, you know," said Osierton jeeringly; and they all three laughed.

I was now convinced that Dinelli had by some means become

acquainted with the fact of the despatch of the gold ; so I determined to delay my departure as long as possible, in order to enable Dr. Mills to reach Currie's Post in sufficient time to halt, rest his mules, and again resume his journey ; by which time the safety of the consignment would be secure.

I answered the trio with a jest, and my spirits rose at the thought of having outwitted the scoundrels.

I noticed that they did not communicate with any other members of the band, so concluded that if they had any enterprise in hand, they meant to keep it to themselves.

When the time arrived that I had decided to start, I ordered the driver to harness, having previously hired two fresh mules from a farmer in the neighbourhood. When all was ready I drove away.

A number of the men were standing about, but I did not observe Dinelli or his two new friends.

Carefully examining my revolver, which was loaded in all six chambers, I brought it conveniently to my hand and prepared for whatever might happen.

There was only one part of the road where I could be attacked at a disadvantage, and this was situated about half-way between the Falls and Currie's Post, at a bend round a narrow shoulder of rock. Before coming in sight of this place I pulled up a few moments, and addressing the driver said :

"Now, my man, I want you, on reaching Botha's Nek, to drive your hardest round the bend, and tear at full speed down the hill into the open. I fear I am going to be attacked, but nothing must stop you. There is a sovereign, and if we reach Currie's Post, I will give you another. But should you hesitate for a moment—see this"—and I pointed to my revolver.

"Hi!" he yelled, as he caught the coin I threw to him. Then flourishing his huge whip and calling the animals by their names, he urged them on in the usual Hottentot fashion.

I had determined to push boldly on, concluding that Dr. Mills would by this time have reached his destination ; for my life would certainly pay the forfeit should they discover the ruse I had practised.

On reaching the point I had indicated, the driver rose in his seat and brought his whip down with a crack like a pistol-shot, taking the critical turn at a breakneck pace. But as we rounded the curve there arose three figures from behind one of the larger rocks, with rifles pointed and shouting to us to stop.

"Drive on!" I cried. "Drive on!"

Seeing that we disregarded their menacing demand, they delivered a volley, one shot striking the driver and tumbling him into the road, the wheels passing over him.

I gathered up the reins as best I could, shouting and encouraging the mules to keep up the pace, and with such success that I was enabled to reach the incline that led to the open country.

Having by this time re-loaded, they sent in a second volley, one shot striking me in the cheek, while another disabled two of the leading mules. This brought me to a standstill, and the three men rushed forward. I fired at the foremost, bringing him down, and the other two, swearing fearful oaths, made towards me. I recognised them as Osierton and Mondrum. The man I had hit was Dinelli.

I slipped out on the off-side, where I was partially covered by the cart.

"Stand back," I said, "or I'll fire. What do you want?"

"Hand over the money," replied Osierton with an oath.

"What money?" I asked. "There is no money here."

"Don't parley with us," said the other ruffian, "or I'll put a bullet through you in no time."

"I tell you there is no money here," I repeated; "nothing but medical stores. Look for yourselves."

"Stand out of the way then," said Osierton.

I stood aside, revolver in hand, while the blood streamed down my face and neck. They both dived into the cart.

At this instant I cast my eyes down the road, and saw a small party of mounted men riding towards us. I sprang to the crest of the hill, and waved my hat frantically to them. The next moment I heard a report and felt a burning sensation at the side of my head; then, dropping to the ground, lost all consciousness.

When I recovered, I found myself in bed at Currie's Post, suffering from a gun-shot wound that had nearly made an end of me; missing by almost a hair's breadth, but giving me a nasty knock on the head and carrying away a portion of my left ear.

The horsemen I had seen were Commissary-General Lanfree and three officers of his department on their way from the front. They at once observed my signal, rode rapidly up the hill, where they found me insensible, the driver severely wounded in the neck and two ribs broken by the wheels having passed over him.

Dinelli was dead. The other two rode off, and escaped to the Orange Free State, taking part against us subsequently in the Transvaal War; but after that nothing further was ever learnt regarding them.

The money was conveyed safely by Dr. Mills to Ladysmith, and deposited with the Resident Magistrate, from whose custody it was afterwards transferred to its proper destination: the worthy Doctor receiving back his supply of medical appliances.

I was complimented by the General for what he was pleased to term the courage and resolution I had displayed; and on the report reaching home I was promoted, and received a decoration in recognition of the service I had rendered.

BYGONE DAYS.

I AM an old woman. The sands of life are nearly spent, and I cannot hope to see many more summers; but as I look back over the years that are past, how many a picture rises before my weary eyes! May I present some of them to your sight, reader?

It is a lovely spring morning early in the century; the sun is dancing on the young leaves, and bringing out the perfume of the flowers. Here in London even the air seems full of gladness and of promises of all sorts of lovely things. The blue sky is partly covered with soft white clouds, for there has been a shower, and the road is still wet from the large drops which fell a little while ago.

At Hyde Park Corner a pretty young woman is standing irresolute —whether to pick her way across the muddy road at this point, or to move a little farther on before she makes the venture. She is young, and very pretty, with soft pink-and-white cheeks and blue eyes. Clinging to her skirts is a little child just able to trot along alone, yet a sad encumbrance to the mother, who has to make her way in and out of all those carriages and carts without the aid of the friendly policeman who, in these days, pilots across all distressed womenfolk.

Just at this moment two gentlemen ride slowly by, and the attention of one being caught by the group—he turns to his companion, saying: "Stop, sir, and look at this lovely little girl."

They are George the Third and the Prince of Wales, afterwards George the Fourth. The child in question is my unworthy self. I cannot help thinking that what must have attracted them both must have been my sweet mother's pretty face, though, of course, I do not remember the scene I have so often heard described.

My first recollection is of a very different scene. I am a naughty little girl, who has just escaped from the hands of her nurse, clad in a perfectly new pelisse. I run headlong along some soft grass, by the side of a park paling. It is autumn. The leaves are falling, and as I scamper along, I see peeps of lovely foliage through the wooden palings. What care I for the picturesque! I see before me a delicious little heap of dirt, formed of withered leaves, and of the scrapings of the moist road. Without an instant's hesitation, I spring into the middle of it, new pelisse and all, to fall headlong and be picked up by the panting nurse, who arrives on the scene in time to capture me, covered from head to foot with mud, and my pretty pelisse irrecoverably spoilt.

I am one of several sisters, and as I grow up I assume the proud position of beauty of the family. There is a miniature of me somewhere now; and looking at it, I cannot believe that I was ever half so

pretty. I am sure that the painter must have flattered me egregiously. I could never have had such blue eyes, such lovely colouring, such white shoulders. Still I look at it with pride. Why should not we all honestly confess that to a woman the gift of beauty is a very precious gift indeed? A pretty face finds the world so pleasant; and is it not one of the greatest happinesses possible to be fair in the eyes of those we love? But I can truly say that the compliment which gave me greatest pleasure was when my mother, and others also, said that Anne was as modest as she was pretty.

We had a pleasant life. My father, who had seen a great deal of active service in the navy, had retired as admiral, and took a place in the country. We girls went to a school where every accomplishment then in fashion was taught; and when we were supposed to have acquired all these, we returned home to lead a merry life. I had several brothers, and the rule of my father's house was unbounded hospitality. The family all moved up to London in the season to a house in Dorset Square, then one of the most fashionable parts, and there were junketings and merrymakings enough. Oh! the fun and frolic of those days! Can it be the same world?

I think we were very much spoilt. I know when we came home fresh from school it was thought a grand sight to see at a county ball the three Miss Verschoyles dance a quadrille with all the last new steps; and how we pirouetted, and set to our partners, while we held our heads high, and felt that we were the observed of all observers.

Then there came a dreadful day for me. King William the Fourth was staying somewhere in the neighbourhood, and graciously condescended to become my father's guest at dinner. I do not remember the dinner; I do not suppose that I appeared at it; but in the evening it was signified to us that the King, who was very musical, would like to hear us play. I was ordered to the piano with my sister to perform our grandest piece—a duet. In vain I protested that I could not play before the King. Go I must, and go I did; but as I worked away at my part, the tears I could not control filled my eyes. Still in desperation I played on. A gentleman in attendance came behind me, and kindly patting me on the shoulder, said: "Come, come! don't be frightened; he is *only* a man." I think this little bit of common-sense, administered with such kindly intention, helped me to bring that dreadful duet to a more successful termination.

Must I tell you of my own little romance? The whole of which has never been breathed to any human creature, though I think it was guessed by my mother. Of a pair of blue eyes which looked tenderly into mine, of a tall figure always near me in the crowd which surrounded us, of some verses written for me, and me alone (for that was the fashion in those days), each word of which I think I could repeat, though it is so long ago. There is not much to tell:

he was considered, I fancy, an undesirable parti. Whether he ever spoke to my father, or whether he found out without any words passing that his attentions were not acceptable, I know not; but suddenly he ceased to come—he disappeared from our little society, and I was left to bear my pain as best I could, and hide it from the world in general. Once more I saw him, but this was later. I think I grew very fretful at this time. My mother took me to France—a great journey in those days, and then we returned and settled into our house in Dorset Square for the season, and I was allowed to do very much as I liked by all the rest of the party.

It is Spring again. A lovely warm Spring day. We have been dancing the night before, and have kept it up later than usual. Having struggled through the morning, we all feel that we have a right to be lazy this afternoon. I go to take refuge in my own room, and lie down in delicious idleness on the bed. Outside in the little garden belonging to the house there is sunshine and warmth.

The lilacs are all in blossom, and the yellow tassels of the laburnum nod up and down in the breeze. There is a syringa bush close to my window, and the sweet scent is borne in on the warm air. The old-fashioned green shutters are partly closed, and I lie there, idly dreaming—happy.

Suddenly the door bursts open with a rush. It is my favourite sister Dorothy, but the very sight of her makes me cross at this moment. What can she want? I soon know. I am expected to leave my peace and quiet, to get up and go down to entertain some visitors who have arrived. I try to coax Dorothy to go down instead of me.

"No, indeed, Anne! You know Hester Graham is your friend, not mine! You must go; I am much too tired."

So, wearily, I rise, smooth out my little white frock, run a comb through the bunch of short curls on my forehead, which will not be kept in order, and descend the stairs.

At the drawing-room door I hesitate; I am still cross. That tiresome Dorothy! Why was not she as good-natured as usual? I wind the long blue ribbon ends of my sash round my fingers, and then throw them into the air; it gives me something to do. I feel still cross. I enter the room, take up the blue ribbons, and begin again. Someone comes forward from the inner drawing-room, and a voice says: "Anne, this is my brother." I look up to find two dark eyes fixed upon me—and to know that I have met my fate.

After this we often meet. My mother is walking in Regent's Park when a carriage dashes up and stops, while the gentleman driving it throws the reins to the groom, and jumping lightly to the ground begs that he may have the honour of driving my mother home. Sh is charmed, begs him to come in and have luncheon, and from this moment I hear nothing but praises of him from her and everyone else.

Before the summer is over I find myself engaged to him, and our house is filled with the pleasant excitement of the first wedding in the family. Presents come from all quarters; there are grand discussions over my frocks, etc. Who does not know the sort of fluster all this causes in a house full of young girls?

The wedding is not to be in London, but at a quiet seaside place, to which the family has moved for the autumn. At last the day comes. My sisters are my only bridesmaids. How pretty they look in their pink and white muslins, and hats with pink feathers! My dress is of simple white satin, which hangs in heavy folds, as the fashion was in those days. But my chief glory is my hat! I wish I could show it to you. Of white satin and dainty lace, with lovely white plumes and little sprigs of orange-flower, turned up a little bit on one side. It is big enough to shelter me.

It is a lovely day, the sun streams in, and a ray falls on us as we stand together before the altar. I listen to the words with a dreamy feeling. Can it indeed be me standing there? My eyes wander away. Through an open door I see the sea and shore with the tiny waves breaking one after another on the soft sand. I come back with a start to the service. The clergyman is speaking to me. "Wilt thou have this man for thy wedded husband?" I answer, "I will," and presently a gold ring is slipped on my finger, and then in a moment it seems that it is all over, and Anne Verschoyle has ceased to exist. For the last time I have to sign that name, and my new life has begun.

We have been married a month and two days. I am beginning to get accustomed to the sound of my new name, and my dignity as a married woman. But a dreadful ordeal is before me. We are to leave this quiet little nook, and to set out on a round of visits before we settle into my husband's rectory, for he is a clergyman. First and foremost among these visits comes the one to his father, the Squire, who lives in one of the eastern counties. Now I have the greatest admiration and respect for my father-in-law, but I am distinctly afraid of him. And living at the old country home to which I am to be taken, there are two unmarried daughters—my husband's sisters, both very much older than I—and of them I am still more afraid.

I shiver when I think of it all, for as yet I have not even seen the eldest Miss Graham. I lie awake the night before we start, and wish, oh! how I wish that I was Dorothy, and not Anne; for Dorothy is sprightly, full of wit, and is afraid of nothing.

However, the day comes, and we set off. We travel a long day, and rather late in the afternoon reach the Blue Post Inn, at which my father-in-law's carriage is to meet us. I put my head out. Yes! there it is, the four horses tossing their heads, and a little crowd has collected round it to see it start.

We have many miles to drive before we reach the hall. It gets

dark. I lean back in my corner. My heart goes pit-a-pat. I stretch out my hand to feel the strong grasp of another to give me courage. At last we stop. We have reached the first gate, which is thrown open. I see large old trees against the fading light. We make a sudden sweep and draw up before a large house. The door is wide open, and out streams a ruddy light; the porch is thronged with people. There stands the Squire himself, bare headed, to welcome us. He draws me into the bright circle of light, kissing me on both cheeks. I look up, and see a tall, handsome, dignified woman, with something very sweet as well as decided in her face, and by her side, Hester, whose eyes shine a welcome. These are my new sisters, and from that day when they received so kindly the little bride till long years after, when I was left to mourn their loss, there was only love between us.

The next day I should be quite happy, for I have quite recovered from my fright, and the hall is charming, but my husband is not well. All the morning I try to think it is nothing, and go exploring about, taken first by one and then by another to see the house. The pretty, bright, morning room; the quaint drawing-room, with its green Indian paper, covered with birds and flowers and butterflies, thought in those days a marvel of art, with its large windows, looking out on the beautiful old cedar trees. I have been shown the portrait of my husband's mother, who was a great beauty—the toast of the county—and who, though she was rich as well as beautiful, chose to marry for love, and, while she was still only a girl, ran away with the Squire, and never repented it, but lived happily ever afterwards. I gaze at the beautiful face, with its soft brown eyes and marvellous complexion, and do not wonder at the fascination she was said to exert on all around her.

The morning passes, and I go in to luncheon a little tired, hoping to find my husband quite well again; but no! his hands are hot and dry; he lies back on the armchair, looking weary and ill; it seems an effort to him even to speak.

This is some hours ago now. A groom has been despatched on horseback to fetch the doctor, but he lives eight miles off. Will he never be back? In my impatience I cannot be content to sit quietly and wait. I go out on the corridor at the top of the stairs, and walk restlessly backwards and forwards. The afternoon is drawing to a close. The weather has suddenly changed. A keen wind is blowing and moaning round the house; the rain is descending in torrents. Surely—surely there is nothing in the world so sickening as suspense!

At last there is a sound—he has come! but now I grow quite faint and cold for a moment, for my foolish heart has conjured up all sorts of dreadful fancies. But though these are not true, and the doctor half-an-hour later tries to reassure me, by declaring that a few days will find his patient in a very different state, yet this is really the beginning of a long and serious illness. My first month spent in that

old hall is spent in most anxious nursing. By day and by night I sit in the big white armchair, close to the bed. Indeed, the days and nights are all indistinguishable in my recollection, until the happy day comes that the patient is pronounced to be certainly gaining strength, and creeping away from the borderland, which at one time seemed so near us; and I can go, with a grateful heart, to lie down and sleep in peace.

Meantime the county has been full of gay doings, got up in the first instance in our honour. Balls and dinner-parties, which in some cases were delayed for a little while, but which took place later, and the fame of which penetrated even to the sick-room. While my pale blue silk and the white satin gown, now trimmed with costly lace, lie hidden away in the remote recesses of some wardrobe out of sight.

After this I have little more to tell. We go to our home in a remote country parish. For forty years I disappear from the old gay scenes almost as entirely as if the sea had swallowed us up. We are ten miles from the nearest town, and later when the railway comes in our direction, it is sixteen miles off. But my life is filled with all the simple duties of a country clergyman's wife.

There are the parish, the schools and our poor people to think of, and I have little children of my own who quickly grow up into tall lads and lasses.

Once, a few years after my marriage, on the first visit we paid my father, in London, I remember as the carriage—heavily laden with luggage, for we had posted up to town—was turning the corner of a street, I looked up, and there—standing on a doorstep—was the hero of my young days. I saw him glance at the occupants of the carriage, my husband and my little fair-haired Johnnie, who, tired with the long journey, lay with his little head in my arms.

Our eyes met. What did I read in his expression? Reproach? Yes! bitter reproach was there! as if he would have said: "You have spoilt my life." His face haunted me for days, and yet surely my part had been as hard to bear at one time as his.

Now I am an old woman. My cares and hopes are all for others; for my children and my grandchildren. I go back to the Hall, and on sunny days I am pushed in my garden-chair under the old chestnut trees. I have many loved ones near me. A long slender hand rests on the back of my chair, and the sweetest voice to me in all the world asks gently if I am tired.

THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT.

A Bearnais Romance.

THE Haute Plante at Pau is a square, trampled piece of goose green, famous as the gift of *Our Henry* to his loving subjects, muddy or burnt up according to the time of year.

On the west, the great Caserne rears its five stories to the sky, hiding the sunset from the town; and, nearest to the Rue Bayard, within the barrack moat, is a patch of grass decorated with drying lines, scarlet "continuations," blue coats, white-lined waistcoats, and, perhaps, an odd soldier in disgrace seated on the wall, dangling his legs in the air.

The other three sides are bounded by broad gravelled walks, shaded by quadruple rows of spreading elms; and the one facing the Caserne is, during the winter at least, the resort of travelling booths, photographers, cooks, learned fleas, and giddy-go-rounds in succession. These appear about St. Martin's Day, and thenceforward until the month of June there is opportunity enough to learn the Marseillaise by heart.

But, perhaps, the greatest sight on the Haute Plante is the drilling of recruits. Four hours a day, even when the thermometer marks below freezing, with snow above and under foot, the hapless rustic dislocates his back to the sound of "Un, deux; un, deux."

Drilling of recruits and funerals. From every quarter these last come; for, the Caserne hides also the open cemetery gates and the double avenue, along which Protestant and Catholic travel, separate to the end, to lie side by side in the common earth. Soldier, civilian, peasant and peer, all take the Rue Bayard as their way to final rest.

The Haute Plante sees every phase of life, except that of the grazing sheep, for which the everlasting *Henri* meant it.

It was opposite the Rue Bayard, and near the great Caserne, that the last scene of Act I. was played out.

Two lovers sat under the elms, regardless of the soldier on the wall, and the April sunshine lapped them round with gold. The clock of St. Martin was chiming out the quarters in a minor third, and the giddy-go-round in the distance was grinding out the Marseillaise.

They were talking together, after the wont of all true sweethearts, deliberately, earnestly. Life lay before them, glorious in imagination. As the young man spoke, the girl's dimpled chin sank lower in the collar of her loose cloth jacket, till he, too, had to bend his head to see more of her face than the gracious outline of a forehead, shaded by soft dark hair and a blue silk handkerchief.

Agathe Cazayus was the only child of a tradesman in the town. Life was given for life when she was born, and she had grown up without a mother's care. Her father, as widower, became unusually dévot, and lost sight of a parent's duty in religious ardour. His heart, at least, was cold to natural affection. All the power of love given him had been buried in his mother's grave before his marriage, so that, when his meek-eyed wife slipped out of the world, she left no blank behind for him, and no tenderness for her orphan baby.

Cazayus attended mass most diligently, and looked closely to a business that in no way fell off for the report that the Blessed Virgin, whose picture hung in his room, had bowed her head at him on more than one occasion.

But, if his worldly goods suffered nothing through discipline, his health and temper did. He was not a pleasant man to deal with. Blood, nourished on black coffee and soupe maigre, had no tendency to engender cheerfulness. Yet Saint Pierre, as the irreverent called him, might have been forgiven; nay, even admired, could he have been content to sacrifice himself alone. But this he could not do. From the hour of his daughter's birth, he determined that she should follow in his steps, and add, by renunciation of all earthly pleasure, to the spiritual glory of the name of Cazayus.

He considered, however, that it would be quite time enough to communicate his intentions when the child should be old enough to act on his desire. It was not his will to have her convent-bred. No, she should live in the world, have seen and recognised its vanity, before, of her own free choice, she cast the charms of life aside for those of self-denial.

Meanwhile, as her infant cries and crows disturbed his meditations, he sent her to a distant cousin, Marie Addias by name, who lived beyond the Gave at Jurançon. Having but one child, a boy, of her own, she was glad enough to teach the secrets of a ménage to a girl whose pension was well paid for.

Under this good woman's roof, Agathe sprang into as fair a lass as any in Béarn. She learned other things besides housewifery. To sew, for instance; to fold a silken handkerchief more neatly round her shapely head than the other maidens in the village folded theirs; to sing the songs that *Our Henry* loved in a sweet, shrill voice that echoed through the house; and to think her cousin Jean the best, the bravest, the handsomest man in all the world.

Matters had come to a crisis that April afternoon, when Jean drew plans of a future dwelling on the gravel of the Haute Plante near the great Caserne, and when Agathe buried her chin in that enviable coat collar.

Poor lass! She remembered every item of his dress many a year after: the colour of his fine cloth blouse, and how his berret suited him; she had chosen it herself. She could recall each word he said that day, even when her memory for other things was not so good.

The whole family had come up from Jurançon to spend the Sunday with her father; and, as he was not yet too saintly to transact business on the day set apart for rest and prayer, Agathe and Jean had disappeared together, that Madame Addias might broach the subject of their marriage to him. No idea of objection entered any head of the three. Jean was well-to-do; far richer than his hoped-for bride, whose dowry, owing to Cazayus's charity, could not be very large. A son-in-law, steady and respectable, was not to be despised; and as the old man had never shown much interest in his daughter, the affair would, no doubt, be easily arranged.

Time was wearing on. Jean took out his watch at last to compare it with the Caserne clock. He was loth to break the charm of the hour, for evenings such as this come but once in a lifetime, and a faint foreboding of evil saddened him. They rose, however, hand in hand, and slowly went together down the avenue, followed by the soldier's idle gaze from his perch above the moat.

The day is dark: the sky overhead matches in colour the mud under foot; long wreaths of mist trail through the valleys, clinging to the leafless woods upon the hills; there is not a breeze to stir the heavy bank of clouds which, blotting out the Pyrenees, invest the Coteaux with an air of spurious mystery.

Yesterday the Bayonne road, just outside Pau, was picturesque; the brown beeches in the Parc sighed softly as the south wind whispered of spring; and the Himalaya pines waved their huge arms lazily, for all seasons are pleasant to them.

That was yesterday. To-day the rain drips dolefully from both alike, and even the golden-rod in the meadows is dark and scentless.

Billières is a name associated with memories of golf and lawn-tennis, with drumming and the mournful sound of bugle practice; for on the plain beside the Gave, young ladies run after skipping balls, and soldiers daily murder harmony.

But on the hill above, opposite the Parc, there is a building into which, if the noise of earthly occupation penetrates, it enters gently and with reverence. The church stands by itself near a little cemetery, and within, the mouldy atmosphere seems laden with the prayers of those who here have made their wants and trials known. The pictured saint above the altar peers through the semi-darkness over outstretched wings of kneeling angels beside the Cross.

It is a poor place in point of splendour; but, hallowed none the less because of painted panelling and old tin sconces nailed against the wall.

Before the Virgin's shrine there kneels a young girl whose tears are falling as she prays. Words apparently have failed her, but her eyes speak an agony of supplication.

Poor Agathe! Love's golden light had not brightened many days

for her. Hardly had the lovers reached her father's house in the Place, than trouble met them at the door. Cazayus opened it himself, his face flushed with anger, and roughly seizing his daughter's arm, he pulled her away from Jean.

"Ah!" he snarled. "Thou hast made good use of thy time, mademoiselle! But it is not the custom in France for modest girls to choose their husbands. Shame on thee, thou shameless one! Go upstairs; I will speak with thee presently. Upstairs, I say!" he thundered, seeing she made no effort to obey.

Agathe fled. She had been too frightened to do so before; now she ran as if for life. She heard the salon door shut sharply after her father and Jean as she reached the first floor, where she sat on the landing for what seemed to her like hours, listening anxiously to every sound.

At last they came out again into the hall. She sprang to the banisters and leaned over.

"This is a bad day's work, Cazayus, and so I tell thee," said his foster mother's voice. "Thou wilt live to repent it many a year."

"Ah, bah!" returned Cazayus, peevishly.

"And I assure you, monsieur," added Jean, passionately, "I will never give her up. Had you chosen a better man in my stead I would have submitted in silence. But to shut up such a flower in a convent! It is a sin. So surely as I live she shall be my wife."

"Merci, monsieur! I thank you for telling me your honourable intentions," said Cazayus, politely. And for the last time that Sunday he banged the outer door in shutting it.

Agathe's heart gave a wild bound at the noise. Were they gone, then, without a word. Oh! it was impossible!

"Jean, Jean! Mother! wait for me! I am coming!" she cried, running headlong downstairs. "Oh, wait for me a little moment!"

But she only found Cazayus waiting for her, with a cruel smile on his lips, as he stood with his legs apart in the entrance.

What means he used to wring consent from the unhappy child, she never told. It was part of the old man's plan that she should take the veil voluntarily, leaving her home for the convent by her own choice; and he prevailed over her.

Weeks, months passed over, but, when the anniversary of that April day came round, Agathe had submitted to her fate. The next would find her among the Franciscan nuns at Arles.

Cazayus was happy. Though he complained of constant rheumatism in his side, and his general health failed rapidly, he was contented; even indulgent. Having ascertained Jean was safe in Normandy on business, he let his daughter do precisely as she liked.

That is how she happened to be alone in the Church at Billières, kneeling before the Virgin's shrine.

As she left the chapel, she turned into the grave-yard. The stone steps, leading up to the open gate, were worn, broken in parts, and

the dripping weeds, she half believed, shared in her grief. There was a soft, silent drizzle falling, which gathered on every leaf and blade of grass, like sympathetic tears.

The buried in this cemetery were mostly country folk, whose relatives have seldom time to keep their memory green. Hence, Nature, pitifully courteous, takes the charge upon herself, growing tall grass above forgotten graves, whose presence is just hinted at by pinks and red gladiola peeping between the stalks. In the centre of this solitary half acre stands an iron cross, and a young Magnolia tree, which, having drawn in sadness from the soil, sways and creaks mournfully when the wind blows.

Agathe read the legends on the stones without understanding their import. She was dazed by sorrow. "A ma seconde mère." "A ma sœur bien aimée." One inscription she read over several times.

✠
Ci git
LAPLANTE PIERRE,
Né le 9 Septembre, 1805;
Décédé le 24 Juin, 1878,
à l'age de 73 ans.
P. P. L.

As she came to the last word for the third time, a burst of music rose to her from the valley. A peasant's wedding party was marching down the Bayonne Road.

Agathe started as the shrill scream of the pipes struck her ear.

"Décédé le 24 Juin, 1878." *That was last year! That was exactly a month after that happy day with Jean; the last time she had seen him; the last time she would ever see him on earth!*

With a cry, like that of a wounded animal, she threw herself on the stone at her feet, and broke afresh into passionate weeping.

Three months later Marie Addias sat in the garden before her cottage alone; Agathe was a novice at Arles.

The evening sunshine was gilding the far-off Pyrenees and dancing on the trembling poplar leaves in the plain. Now and then the full, rich note of the nightingale filled the still summer air. But the old woman heard and saw nothing. She was thinking how she would tell her son the evil news when he came home that night.

Someone opened the gate, and came up the path with a tired step, a hopeless step, a step that was old while yet young.

Marie started to her feet, ran and flung herself into the new-comer's arms.

"My son! My son!" she sobbed.

He held her close to him; his eyes overflowed. Poor lad! Sorrow was new to him, and he was no stoic.

Presently he asked: "Where is she, mother? Where is Agathe?"

"At Arles," said Marie, brokenly. "But she does not stay there. A mission has been sent from the Convent to Buenos Ayres, and Agathe is one of the volunteers. She goes to-night to Bordeaux. To-morrow the steamer starts for America."

"America!" cried the young man.

"Yes. She is lost to thee, certainly, for ever now, my poor boy," said Marie, breaking into fresh sobs.

"America!" muttered Jean. Then he straightened himself up, and repeated, in a different tone: "America! Very good."

"How?" exclaimed his mother. "Very good! How good?"

But a new spirit seemed to have entered her son. He shrugged his shoulders, and answered:

"Agathe is not a nun yet. For the rest she never shall be while I live; no, not if I call the devil to my aid."

"He is mad with grief," moaned the old woman.

Jean laughed. "Give me something to eat, mother, and help me to get some clothes packed, for I also will go to Bordeaux to-night. I also will sail to-morrow for America."

The evil spirit of desperation left Jean as quickly as it came. He was a good lad. "*God is good*," he said to himself that night as the train whirled him away from Pau. "And if He is good, He will not suffer this injustice to be done."

During the long voyage, he behaved himself wisely. At first, indeed, his heart was full of bitterness when he saw Agathe among the Franciscan nuns. He thought many hard things of them. He was exceedingly unfair towards these devoted women, who were going to convert the heathen at Buenos Ayres. He said to himself, they were no better than thieves.

But, as the days passed on, he changed his mind. The weather became stormy; nearly all the emigrants were sick and unhappy. Their children screamed with terror; their mothers howled with despair, and wherever the suffering and confusion was greatest, there might the dark-robed sisters be seen, heedless of personal discomfort, eager to alleviate distress.

And how kind they were to Agathe!

Jean, observing their tenderness, was ashamed of himself. Presently he constituted himself their servant. As they thought for others, so he tried to think for them; and the good God rewarded him.

After the first start of recognition, Agathe perceived he did not mean to make her lot harder to endure. She loved him all the more for his forbearance; and, strange to say, the love was sweet, not bitter. She could not account for this new-found happiness; she could only pray for him and herself.

So the voyage drew to an end. Jean had seen the colour stealing back into his darling's cheeks, and the light come into her eyes, yet he had made no attempt to speak to her: "for," said he, "that would

give her pain." He hardly knew himself, as yet, what he intended to do.

One day he heard one Sister say to another: "The Bishop is a good man. I have no fear. When we are in Buenos Ayres, he will tell us what to do. He is as wise as he is good, do you see?"

"As wise as he is good," repeated Jean to himself. "Then I will go to him, too. I will tell him all about Agathe, and perhaps he will get her back for me."

The idea pleased him more and more. The longer he considered it, the brighter it looked. Certainly he would go to the Bishop, when he set foot ashore. And he kept his word.

Monseigneur listened to his tale with interest and great indignation. "God has more need of good mothers than of indifferent nuns!" he said energetically. "You did well to come to me, my son. Agathe is still a novice, you say? Well, then, I will write to the Curé at Pau, and to the Bishop of your district. All influence shall be used to gain M. Cazayus's consent to the marriage. He will not refuse; he dare not! Have a little patience, and, by God's help, we shall have good news by next mail.

Jean went away with a lighter heart. But it was hard work waiting. Before the next French mail came in, he had almost worn himself to a skeleton, and a restless skeleton into the bargain. Monseigneur did not keep him in longer suspense than was necessary. He sent for him as soon as possible.

Jean was trembling like an aspen leaf when he obeyed the summons.

"Courage, my son!" said the Bishop, kindly. "There is good news for you. The marriage may take place."

"Has M. Cazayus, then, consented?" cried Jean.

The Bishop made no answer. Then, after a long pause, he said:

"Pierre Cazayus is dead!"

Jean started.

"Yes," continued Monseigneur. "Two days after you left Pau, he was found dead before his crucifix. God rest his soul!"

"Amen!" answered Jean.

If you pass the little church at Billières, and the churchyard gate, you will come, by and by, to a chestnut wood on the brow of the hill.

The grass here is dotted with field flowers and bracken; autumn crocuses and fragrant mountain pinks in October, and in the spring-time celandine and sorrel. The trees are very old; grey limbs hold up their dead branches from the midst of fresh green leaves, and, here and there, a mighty trunk has split in half.

From the edge of the wood, where the hill slopes abruptly into a pretty lane, you may look out over the great plain that stretches for miles and miles into a soft haze, with poplar trees marking the

high road, and the vine-clad coteaux behind Billières to break the sameness of cornlands and meadows. There is a kindly silence under the chestnuts.

If the wind blows from the south, you catch a subdued medley of bugle calls and drum tattoos, which riot in soft confusion overhead; but, as a rule, the only sound is that of twittering birds or a cock-crow from a farm-yard close at hand.

Should you look out for this farm-yard, you will find it just beyond the lane. It is filled with chickens and hens, and pigeons, all picking and clucking and cooing delightedly among the hay and wheat stacks.

The house itself bounds two sides, and pollard acacias form a pleasant shade in front. Very often a dog sleeps on the door-step, who supplies endless amusement to a fine grey and pink parrot, that bobs and squawks all day long on the white gate-post at the entrance. And, if you get interested in the creatures so as to forget time, towards sunset you may chance to hear a burst of childish laughter, and, presently, a tiny tot, of two or three years old, will toddle out, his sabots clattering as he runs, and, after him, with outstretched arms, hurries a cheerful, beautiful woman, whose eyes are very bright, and whose dark hair is crowned by a crimson handkerchief.

"Jean! Jean!" she cries, "look at the little one! He is coming to thee!"

Then, from the barn at the other end of the yard, a handsome man looks out, who pushes back his berret carelessly, and answers merrily:

"Ah, the little good-for-naught! Come, then, to thy father."

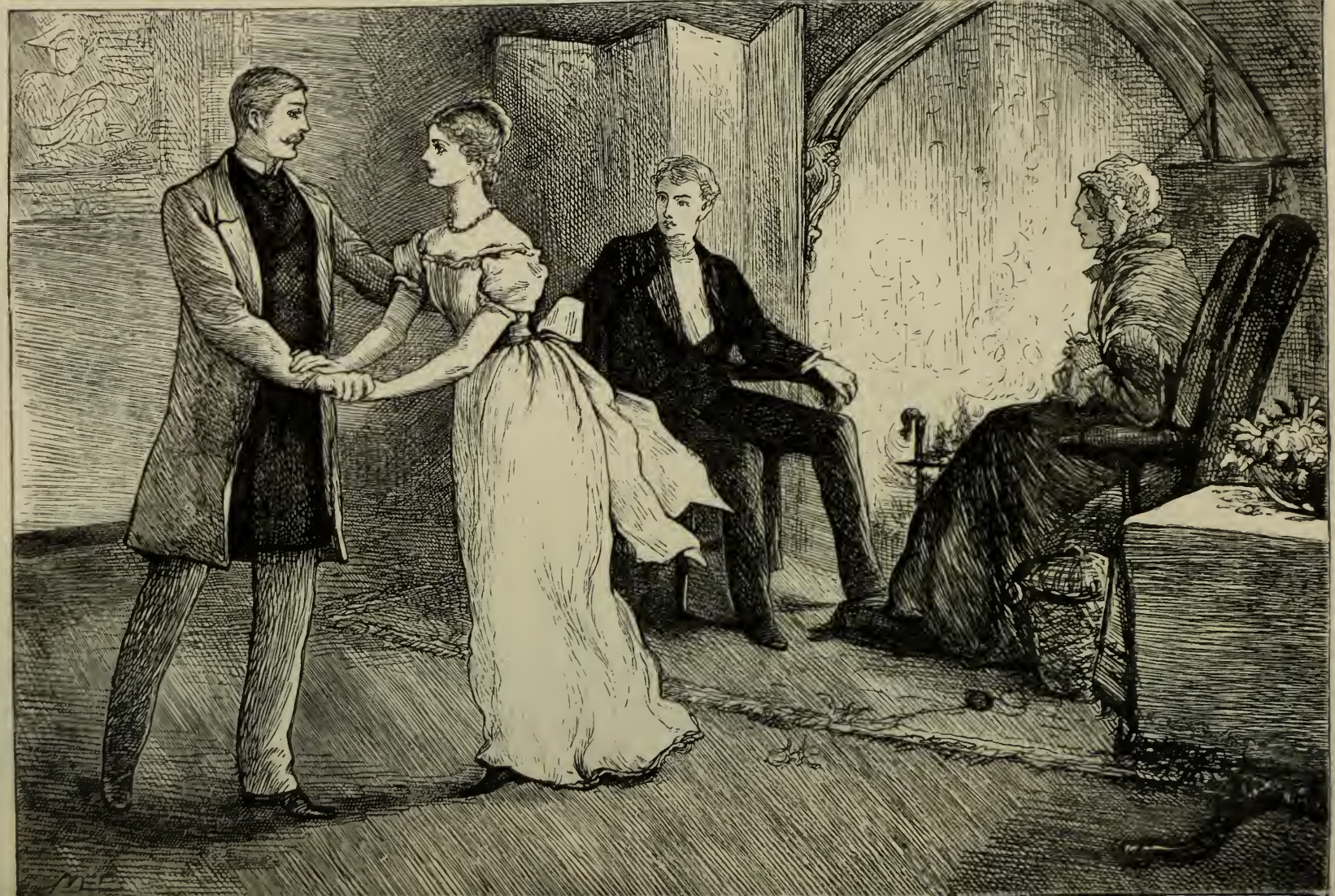
And thereupon he catches the child from the ground, tossing it in the air till it screams again with joy. And their voices and laughter rise to where you stand, under the chestnuts.

Jean and Agathe Addias have a very happy home. They envy neither King nor Queen, nor the President of the Republic. They are contented with their share of this world's goods. Perhaps it seems greater to them than it would to others, because it is so far beyond their expectation.

Here in the village, where *Our Henry* was brought up, they settled after their marriage and subsequent return from America; here their little son was born; and here they hope to live and die in peace. Marie Addias has left Jurançon to make her home with them, and they all agree in spoiling the "three year old," who bids fair to equal his father in determination and good looks.

I don't know there is anything more to add: except, perhaps, that Jean and Agathe not only have never fallen "out of," but seem to fall daily more "in" love with one another as the years go by.

ELWYN KEITH.



THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER VII.

TRIED AT THE OLD BAILEY.

"OH, Mrs. Guy, he is coming, after all! He is, indeed!" Blanche Heriot's joyful tones, as she read the contents of a short letter brought in by the evening post, aroused old Mrs. Guy, who was dozing over her knitting one Tuesday evening in the May twilight.

"Eh? What, my dear? Who do you say is coming?"

"Tom. He says he must stretch a point for once. He cannot let anyone else give me away."

"The Major is to give you away, Blanche."

"I know he intended to do so if Tom failed me. But Tom is my brother."

"Well, well, child; settle it amongst yourselves. I don't see that it matters one way or the other. There's a knock at the door! Dear me! It must be Lord Level."

"Lord Level cannot be back again before to-morrow. He is at Marshdale, you know," dissented Blanche. "I think it may be Tom. I hope it is Tom. He says here he shall be in town as soon as his letter."

"Mr. Strange," announced a servant, throwing wide the drawing-room door.

Charles Strange had only that morning returned from Paris, having crossed by the night mail. The legal business on which he and Mr. Brightman were just now so much occupied, involving serious matters for a client who lived in Paris, had kept Charles over there nearly all the spring. Blanche ran into his arms. She looked upon him as her brother, quite as much as she looked upon Tom.

"And so, Blanche, we are to lose you," he said, when he had kissed her. "And within a day or two, I hear."

He knew very little of Blanche Heriot's approaching marriage, except that the bridegroom was Archibald, Lord Level. And that little he had heard from Mr. Brightman. Blanche did not write to him about it. She had written to tell him she was going to be married to Captain Cross: but when that marriage was summarily broken off by Major Carlen, Blanche felt a little ashamed, and did not send word to Charles.

"The day after to-morrow, at eleven o'clock in the morning," put in Mrs. Guy, in response to the last remark.

All his attention given to Blanche, Charles Strange really had not observed the old lady. He turned to regard her.

"You cannot have forgotten Mrs. Guy, Charles," said Blanche, noticing his doubtful look.

"I believe I had for the moment," he answered, in those pleasant, cordial tones that won him a way with everyone, as he went up and shook the old lady heartily by both hands. "I heard you were staying here, Mrs. Guy, but I had forgotten it."

They sat down: Blanche and Charles near the open window, Mrs. Guy not moving from her easy low chair on the hearth-rug: and began to talk of the wedding.

"Tom is really coming up to give me away," said Blanche, showing him Captain Heriot's short note. "It is *very* good of him, for he must be very busy: but Tom was always good. You are aware, Charles, I suppose, that the regiment is embarking for India? Major Carlen saw the announcement this morning in the *Times*."

At that moment Charles Strange saw, or fancied he saw, a warning look telegraphed to him by Mrs. Guy: and, placing it in conjunction with Blanche's words, he fancied he must know its meaning.

"Yes, I heard the regiment was ordered out," he answered shortly; and turned the subject. "Will Lord Level be here to-night, Blanche? I should like to see him."

"No," she replied. "He went yesterday to Marshdale House, his place in Surrey, and will not return until to-morrow. I think you will like him, Charles."

"I hope you do," replied Charles, involuntarily. "That is the chief consideration, Blanche."

He looked at her meaningly as he spoke, and it brought a blush to her face. What a lovely face it was—fair and pure, its blue eyes haughty as of yore, its golden hair brilliant and abundant. She wore a simple evening dress of white muslin and a blue sash, an inexpensive necklace of twisted blue beads on her neck, no bracelets at all on her arms. She looked what she really was—an inexperienced school-girl. Lord Level's engagement ring on her finger, with its flashing diamonds, was the only ornament of value she had about her.

In the momentary silence that ensued, Blanche left her seat and went to stand at the open window.

"Oh," she exclaimed, an instant later, "I do think this may be Tom! A cab has stopped here."

Charles Strange rose. Mrs. Guy lifted her finger, and he bent down to her. Blanche was still at the window.

"She does not know he has sold out," warningly breathed Mrs. Guy. "She knows nothing of his wild ways, or the fine market he has brought his eggs to, poor fellow. We have kept it from her."

Charles nodded; and the servant opened the door with another announcement.

"Captain Heriot." Blanche flew across the room and was locked in her brother's arms.

Poor Tom Heriot had indeed, as Mrs. Guy expressed it, with more force than elegance, brought his eggs to a fine market. It was some few months now since he sold out of the Army; and what he was doing and how he contrived to exist and flourish without money, his friends did not know. During the spring he had made his appearance in Paris to prefer an appeal for help to Charles, and Charles had answered it to the extent of his power.

Just as gay, just as light-hearted, just as *débonnaire* as ever was Tom Heriot. To see him and to hear him as he sat this evening with them in Gloucester Place, you might have thought him as free from care as an Eton boy—as flourishing as a duke-royal. Little blame to Blanche that she suspected nothing of the existing state of things.

When Charles rose to say "Good-night," Tom Heriot said it also, and they went away together.

"Charley, lad," said the latter, as the street door closed behind them; "could you put me up at your place for two nights—until after this wedding is over?"

"To be sure I can. Leah will manage it."

"All right. I have sent a portmanteau there."

"You did not come up from Southampton to-day, Tom? Blanche thought you did."

"And I am much obliged to them for allowing her to think it. I would have staked my last five-pound note, if you'll believe me, Charley, that old Carlen had not as much good feeling in him. I am vegetating in London; have been for some time. Blanche's letter was forwarded to me by a comrade who lets me use his address."

"And what are you doing in London?" asked Charles.

"Hiding my 'diminished head,' old fellow," answered Tom, with a laugh. No matter how serious the subject, he could not be serious over it.

"How much longer do you mean to stand here?" continued Charles—for the Captain (people still gave him his title) had not moved from the door.

"Till an empty cab goes by."

"We don't want a cab this fine night, Tom. Let us walk. Look how bright the moon is up there."

"Ay; my lady's especially bright to-night. Rather too much so for people who prefer to be in the shade. How you stare, Charley! Fact is, I feel safer inside a cab just now than parading the open streets."

"Afraid of being taken for debt?" whispered Charles.

"Worse than that," said Tom, laconically.

"Worse than that!" repeated Charles. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," and Tom Heriot laughed again. "Except that I am in the deuce's own mess, and can't easily get out of it. There's a cab! Here, driver! In with you, Charley."

And on the following Thursday, when his sister's marriage with Lord Level took place, who so gay, who so free from care, who so attractive as Tom Heriot?—when giving her away. Lord Level had never before seen his future brother-in-law (or *half* brother-in-law, as the more correct term would be), and was agreeably taken with him. A random young fellow, no doubt, given to playing the mischief with his own prospects, but a thorough gentleman, and a very prepossessing one.

"And this is my other brother—I have always called him so," whispered Blanche to her newly-made husband, as she presented Charles Strange to him on their return from church to Gloucester Place. Lord Level shook hands heartily; and Charles, who had been prejudiced against his lordship, of whom tales were told, took rather a liking to the tall, fine man of commanding presence, of handsome face and easy, genial manners.

After the breakfast, to which very few guests were bidden, and at which Mrs. Guy presided as well as her nerves permitted at one end of the table and Major Carlen at the other, Lord and Lady Level departed for Dover on their way to the Continent.

And in less than a week after the wedding, poor Thomas Heriot, who could not do an unkind action, who never had been anyone's enemy in the whole world, and never would be anyone's, except his own, was taken into custody on a criminal charge.

The blow came upon Charles Strange as a clap of thunder. That Tom was in a mess of some kind or other he knew well; nay, in half a dozen messes most likely; but he never glanced at anything so terrible as this. Tom had fenced with his questions during the day or two he stayed in Essex Street, and laughed them off. What the precise charge was, Charles could not learn at the first moment. Some people said felony, some whispered forgery. By dint of much exertion and inquiry, he at last knew that it was connected with "Bills."

Some bills had been put into circulation by Thomas Heriot, and there was something wrong about them. At least, about one of them; since it bore the signature of a man who had never seen the bill.

"I am as innocent of it as a child unborn," protested Thomas Heriot to Charles, more solemnly in earnest than he had ever been heard to speak. "True, I got the bills discounted: accommodation bills, you understand, and they were to have been provided for: but that any good name had been *forged* to one of them, I neither knew nor dreamt of."

"Yet you knew the good name was there?"

"But I thought it had been genuinely obtained."

This was at the first interview Charles held with him in prison. "Whence did you get the bills?" Charles continued.

"They were handed to me by Anstey. He is the true culprit in all this, Charles, and he is slinking out of it, and will get off scot-free. People warned me against the fellow; said he was making a cat's paw of me; and by Jove it's true. I could not see it then, but my eyes are open now. He only made use of me for his own purposes. He had all, or nearly all, the money."

And this was just the truth of the business. The man, Anstey, a gentleman once, but living on his wits for many years past, had got hold of light-headed, careless Tom Heriot, cajoled him of his friendship, and *used* him. Anstey escaped completely "scot-free," and Tom suffered.

Tom was guilty in the eyes of the law; and the law only takes cognisance of its own hard requirements. After examination, he was committed for trial. Charles Strange was nearly wild with distress; Mr. Brightman was much concerned; Arthur Lake (who was now called to the Bar) would have moved heaven and earth in the cause. Away went Charles to Mr. Serjeant Stillingfar: and that renowned special pleader and good-hearted man threw his best energies into the cause.

All in vain. At the trial, which shortly came on at the Old Bailey, Mr. Serjeant Stillingfar exerted his quiet but most telling eloquence uselessly. He might as well have wasted it on the empty air. Though indeed it did effect something, causing the sentence pronounced upon the unfortunate prisoner to be more lenient than it otherwise would have been. Thomas Heriot was sentenced to be transported for seven years.

Transportation beyond the seas was still in force then. And Thomas Heriot, with a cargo of greater or lesser criminals, was shipped on board the transport *Vengeance*, to be conveyed to Botany Bay.

It seemed to have taken up such a little space of time! Very little, compared with the greatness of the trouble. June had hardly come in when Tom was first taken; and the *Vengeance* sailed the beginning of August.

If Mrs. Guy had lamented beforehand the market that poor Tom Heriot had "brought his eggs to," what did she think of it now?

One evening in October a nondescript sort of vehicle, the German

makers of which could alone know the name, arrived at a small village not far from the banks of the Rhine, clattering into the yard of the only inn the place contained. A gentleman and lady descended from it, and a parley ensued with the hostess, more protracted than it might have been, in consequence of the travellers' imperfect German, and her own imperfect French. Could madame accommodate them for the night? was the substance of their demand.

"Well—yes," was madame's not very assured answer: "if they could put up with a small bedroom."

"How small?"

She opened the door of —— it was certainly not a room, though it might be slightly larger than a boot-closet: madame called it a cabinet de toilette. It was on the ground floor, looking into the yard, and contained a bed, into which one person might have crept, provided he bargained with himself not to turn; but two people, never. Three of her beds were taken up with a milor and miladi Anglais, and their attendants.

Mrs. Ravensworth—a young wife—turned to her husband, and spoke in English. "Arnold, what can we do? We cannot go on in the dark, with such roads as these."

"My love, I see only one thing for it: you must sleep here, and I must sit up."

Madame interrupted: it appeared she added a small stock of English to her other acquirements. "Oh, but dat meeseraable for monsieur: he steef in legs for morning."

"And stiff in arms too," laughed Arnold Ravensworth. "Do try and find us a larger bedroom."

"Perhaps the miladi Anglaise might give up one of her rooms for dis one," debated the hostess, bustling away to ask.

She returned, followed by an unmistakable Englishwoman, fine both in dress and speech. Was *she* the miladi? She talked enough for one: vowing she would never give up her room to promiscuous travellers, who prowled about with no *avang courier*, taking their own chance of rooms and beds; and casting, as she spoke, annihilating glances at the benighted wanderers.

"Is anything the matter, Timms?" inquired a gentle voice in the background.

Mr. Ravensworth turned round quickly, for its tones struck upon his remembrance. There stood Blanche, Lady Level; and their hands simultaneously met in surprise and pleasure.

"Oh, this is unexpected!" she exclaimed. "I never should have thought of seeing you in this remote place. Are you alone?"

He drew his wife to his side. "I need not say who she is, Lady Level."

"Are you married, then?"

"Ask Mary."

It was an unnecessary question, seeing her there with him, and Lady Level felt it to be so, and smiled. Timms came forward with an elaborate apology and a string of curtseys, and hoped her room would be found good enough to be honoured by any friends of my lady's.

Lady Level's delight at seeing them seemed as unrestrained as a child's. Exiles from their native land can alone tell that to meet with home faces in a remote spot is grateful as the long-denied water to the traveller in the Eastern desert. And we are writing of days when to travel abroad was the exception, rather than the rule. "There is only one private sitting-room in the whole house, and that is mine, so you must perforce make it yours as well," cried Lady Level, as she laughingly led the way to it. "And oh! what a charming break it will be to my loneliness! Last night I cried till bedtime."

"Is not Lord Level with you?" inquired Mr. Ravensworth.

"Lord Level is in England. While they are getting Timms' room ready, will you come into mine?" she added to Mrs. Ravensworth.

"How long have you been married?" was Lady Level's first question as they entered it.

"Only last Tuesday week."

"Are you happy?"

"Oh, yes."

"I knew your husband long before you did," added Lady Level. "Did he ever tell you so? Did he ever tell you what good friends we were? closer friends, I think, than he and his cousin Cecilia. He used to come to White Littleham Rectory, and we girls there made much of him."

"Yes, he has often told me."

Mrs. Ravensworth was arranging her hair at the glass, and Lady Level held the light for her and looked on. The description given of her by Blanche to her father was a very good one. A gentle, pale girl, with nice eyes, dark, inexpressively soft and attractive. "I shall like you very much," suddenly exclaimed Lady Level. "I think you are very pretty—I mean, you have the sort of face I like to look at." Praise that brought a blush to the cheeks of Mrs. Ravensworth.

The landlady sent them in the best supper she could command at the hour; mutton chops, served German fashion, and soup, which Lady Level's man-servant, Sanders, who waited on them, persisted in calling the potash—and very watery potash it was, flavoured with cabbage. When the meal was over, and the cloth removed, they drew round the fire.

"Do you ever see papa?" Lady Level inquired of Mr. Ravensworth.

"Now and then. Not often. He has let his house again in Gloucester Place, and Mrs. Guy has gone back to the Channel Islands."

"Oh, yes, I know all that," replied Blanche.

"The last time I saw Major Carlen he spoke of you—said that you and Lord Level were making a protracted stay abroad."

"Protracted!" Blanche returned, bitterly; "yes, it is protracted. I long to be back in England, with a longing that has now grown into a disease. You have heard of the *mal du pays* that sometimes attacks the Swiss when they are away from their native land; I think that same malady has attacked me."

"But why?" asked Mr. Ravensworth, looking at her.

"I hardly know," she said, with some hesitation. "I had never been out of England before, and everything was strange to me. We went to Switzerland first, then on to Italy, then back again. The longer we stayed away from England, the greater grew my yearning for it. In Savoy I was ill; yes, I was indeed; we were at Chambéry; so ill as to require medical advice. It was on the mind, the doctor said. He was a nice old man, and told Lord Level that I was pining for my native country."

"Then of course you left for home at once?"

"We left soon, but we travelled like snails; halting days at one place, and days at another. Oh, I was so sick of it! And the places were all dull and retired; as this is; not those usually frequented by the English. At last we arrived here; to stay also, it appeared. When I asked why we did not go on, he said he was waiting for letters from home."

As Lady Level spoke she appeared to be lost in the past—an expression that you may have observed in old people when they are telling you tales of their youth. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy, and it was evident that she saw nothing of the objects around her, only the time gone by. She appeared to be anything but happy.

"Something up between my lord and my lady," thought Mr. Ravensworth. "Had your husband to wait long for the expected letters?" he asked aloud.

"I do not know: several came for him. One morning he had one that summoned him to England without the loss of a moment, and he said there was not time for me to be ready to accompany him. I prayed to go with him. I said Timms could come on afterwards with the luggage. It was of no use."

"Would he not take you?" exclaimed Mrs. Ravensworth, her eyes full of the astonishment her lips would not express.

Blanche shook her head. "No. He was quite angry with me; said I did not understand my position—that noblemen's wives could not travel in that unceremonious manner. I was on the point of telling him that I wished, to my heart, I had never been a nobleman's wife. Why did he marry me, unless he could look upon me as a companion and friend?" abruptly continued Lady Level, perhaps forgetting that she was not alone. "He treats me as a child."

What answer could be made to this? "When do you expect him back again?" asked Mr. Ravensworth, after a pause.

"How do I know?" flashed Lady Level, her tone proving how inexpressibly sore was the subject. "He said he should return for me in a few days, but nearly three weeks have gone by, and I am still here. They have seemed to me like three months. I shall be ill if it goes on much longer."

"Of course you hear from him?"

"Oh, yes, I hear from him. A few lines at a time, saying he will come for me as soon as he possibly can, and that I must not be impatient. I wanted to go over alone, and he returned me such an answer, asking what I meant by wishing to travel with servants only at my age. I shall do something desperate if I am left here another week."

"As you once did at White Littleham when they forbade your going to a concert, thinking you were too ill!" laughed Mr. Ravensworth.

"Dressed myself up in my best frock, and surprised them in the room. I had ten pages of Italian translation for that escapade."

"Do you like Italy?" he inquired, after a pause.

"No, I hate it." And the animus in Lady Level's answer was so intense that the husband and wife exchanged stolen glances. *Something* must be out of gear.

"What parts of Italy did you stay in?"

"Chiefly at Pisa—that is not far from Florence, you know; and a few days at Florence. Lord Level took a villa at Pisa for a month—and why he did so I could not tell, for it was not the season when the English frequent it: no one, so to say, was there. We made the acquaintance of a Mrs. Page Reid, who had the next villa to ours."

"That was pleasant for you—if you liked her."

"But I did not like her," returned Lady Level, her delicate cheeks flushing. "That is, I did, and I did not. She was a very pleasant woman, always ready to help us in any way; but she told dreadful tales of people—making one suspect things that otherwise would never have entered the imagination. Lord Level liked her at first, and ended by disliking her."

"Got up a flirtation with her," thought Mr. Ravensworth. But in that he was mistaken. And so they talked on.

It appeared that the mail passed through the village at night time; and the following morning a letter lay on the breakfast-table for Lady Level.

"My dear Blanche,—I have met with a slight accident, and must again postpone coming to you for a few days. I daresay it will not detain me very long. Rely upon it I shall be with you as soon as I possibly can be.—Ever affectionately yours, Level."

"Short and sweet," exclaimed Blanche, in her bitter disappointment, as she read the note at the window. "Arnold, when you and your wife leave to-morrow, what will become of me, alone here? If ——"

Suddenly, as Lady Level spoke the last word, she started, and began to creep away from the window, as if fearing to be seen.

"Arnold! Arnold! who do you think is out there?" she exclaimed in a timid whisper.

"Why, who?" in astonishment. "Not Lord Level?"

"It is Captain Cross," she said with a shiver. "I would rather meet the whole world than him. My behaviour to him was—was not right; and I have felt ashamed of myself ever since."

Mr. Ravensworth looked out from the window. Captain Cross, seated on the bench in the inn yard, was solacing himself with a cigar.

"I would not meet him for the world! I would not let him see me: he might make a scene. I shall stay in my rooms all day. Why does my husband leave me to such chances as these?"

That Captain Cross had not been well used was certain; but the fault lay with Major Carlen, not with Blanche. Mr. Ravensworth spoke.

"Take my advice, Lady Level. Do not place yourself in Captain Cross's way, but do not run from him. I believe him to be a gentleman; and, if so, he will not say or do anything to annoy you. I will take care he does not, as long as I remain here."

In the course of the morning Captain Cross and Arnold Ravensworth met. "I find Lady Level's here," the Captain abruptly exclaimed. "Are you staying with her?"

"I and my wife arrived here only last night, and were surprised to meet Lady Level."

"Where's *he?*" asked Captain Cross.

"In England."

"He in England and she here, and only six months married! Estranged, I suppose. Well, what else could she expect? People mostly reap what they sow."

Arnold Ravensworth laughed good-humouredly. *He* was not going to give a hint of the state of affairs that he suspected himself.

"You are prejudiced, Cross. Miss Heriot was not to blame for what happened. She was a child: and they did with her as they pleased."

"A child! Old enough to engage herself to one man, and to marry another," retorted Captain Cross, in a burst of angry feeling. "And Level, of all people!"—with sarcastic scorn. "Why does he leave her in Germany while he stays gallivanting in England? What do you say? Met with an accident, and *can't* come for her? That's *his* tale, I suppose. You may repeat it to the Marines, old boy; it won't do for me. *I* know Level; knew him of old."

Lady Level was as good as her word: she did not stir out of her rooms all day. On the following morning when Mr. Ravensworth came out of his chamber, he saw, from the corridor window,

a travelling-carriage in the yard, packed. By the coat-of-arms he knew it for Lord Level's. Timms moved towards him in a flutter of delight.

"Oh, if you please, sir, breakfast is on the table, and my lady is waiting there, ready dressed. We are going to England, sir."

"Has Lord Level come?"

"No, sir: we are going with you. My lady gave orders, last night, to pack up for home. It is the happiest day I've known, sir, since I set foot in these barbarious countries."

Lady Level met him at the door of the breakfast-room; "ready dressed," as Timms expressed it, for travelling, even to her bonnet.

"Do you really mean to go with us?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," was her decisive reply. "That is, you must go with me. Stay here longer, I will not. I tell you, Arnold, I am sick to death of it. If Lord Level is ill and unable to come for me, I am glad to embrace the opportunity of travelling under your protection: he can't grumble at that. Besides ——"

"Besides what?" asked Mr. Ravensworth, for she suddenly stopped.

"I do not choose to remain at an inn in which Captain Cross has taken up his abode: neither would my husband wish me to do so. After you and Mrs. Ravensworth left me last night, I sat over the wood fire, thinking these things over, and made my mind up. If I have not sufficient money for the journey, and I don't think I have, I must apply to you, Arnold."

Whether Mr. Ravensworth approved or disapproved of the decision, he had no power to alter it. Or, rather, whether Lord Level would approve of it. After a hasty breakfast, they went down to the carriage, which had already its array of five horses harnessed to it; Sanders and Timms perched side-by-side in their seat aloft. The two ladies were helped in by Mr. Ravensworth. Captain Cross leaned against the outer-wall of the salle-à-manger, watching the departure. He approached Mr. Ravensworth.

"Am I driving her ladyship off?"

"Lady Level is going to England with us, to join her husband. I told you he had met with an accident."

"A merry meeting to them!" was the sarcastic rejoinder. And, as the carriage drove out of the inn-yard, Captain Cross deliberately lifted his hat to Lady Level: but lifted it, she thought, in mockery.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VINE-COVERED COTTAGE AT PISA.

THAT Archibald, Lord Level had been a gay man, fond of pleasure, fond of talking nonsense to pretty women, the world knew well: and perhaps, world-fashion, admired him none the less for it. But his

wife did not know it. When Blanche Heriot became Blanche Level she was little more than an innocent child; entirely unversed in the world's false ways. She esteemed her husband; ay, and loved him, in a measure, and she was happy for a time.

It is true that while they were staying in Switzerland a longing for home came over her. They had halted in Paris for nearly a fortnight on their outward route. Some very nice people whom Lord Level knew were there; they were delighted with the fair young bride, and she was delighted with them. Blanche was taken about everywhere; no one being more anxious for her amusement than Lord Level himself. But one morning, in the very midst of numerous projected expeditions, he suddenly told Blanche that they must continue their journey that day.

"Oh, Archibald!" she had answered in a sort of dismay. "Why, it is this very afternoon that we were going to Fontainebleau!"

"My dear, you shall see Fontainebleau the next time we are in Paris," he said. "I have a reason for wishing to go on at once."

And they went on. Blanche was far too good and dutiful a wife to oppose her own will to her husband's, or to grumble. They went straight on to Switzerland—travelling in their own carriage—but instead of settling himself in one of those pretty dwellings on the banks of Geneva's Lake, as he had talked of to Blanche, Lord Level avoided Geneva altogether, and chose a fearfully dull little village as their place of abode. Very lovely as to scenery, it is true; but quite unfrequented by travellers. It was there that Blanche first began to long for home.

Next, they went on to Italy, posting straight to Pisa, and there Lord Level took a pretty villa for a month in the suburbs of the town. Pisa itself was deserted: it was hot weather; and Blanche did not think it had many attractions. Lord Level, however, seemed to find pleasure in it. He knew Pisa well, having stayed at it in days gone by. He made Blanche familiar with the neighbourhood; together they admired and wondered at the Leaning Tower, in its green plain, backed by distant mountains; but he also went out and about a good deal alone.

One English dame of fashion was sojourning in the place—a widow, Mrs. Page Reid. She occupied the next villa to theirs, and called upon them; and she and Lady Level grew tolerably intimate. She was a talkative, gay woman of thirty—and beside her Blanche seemed like a timid schoolgirl.

One evening, when dinner was over, Lord Level strolled out—as he often did—leaving his wife with Mrs. Page Reid, who had dined with them. The two ladies talked together, and sang a song or two; and so whiled away the time.

"Let us go out for a stroll, too!" exclaimed Mrs. Page Reid, speaking on a momentary impulse, when she found the time growing monotonous.

Blanche readily agreed. It was a most lovely night; the moon bright and silvery in the Italian sky. Putting on some fleecy shawls, the ladies went down the solitary road, and turned by and by into a narrow lane that looked like a grove of evergreens. Soon they came to a pretty dwelling-place on the left, half villa, half cottage. Vines grew up its trellised walls, flowers and shrubs crowded around it.

"A charming little spot!" cried Mrs. Page Reid, as they halted to peep through the hedge of myrtles that clustered on each side the low entrance-gate. "And two people are sitting there—lovers, I daresay," she added, "telling their vows under the moon-beams."

In front of the vine-wreathed window, on a bench overhung by the branches of the trailing shrubs, the laurels and the myrtles, sat two young people. The girl was tall, slender, graceful; her dark eyes had a flashing fire even in the moonlight; her cheeks wore a rose-red flush.

"How pretty she is!" whispered Blanche. "Look at her long gold ear-rings! And he —— Oh!"

"What's the matter?" cried Mrs. Page Reid, the tone of the last word startling her.

"It is my husband."

"Nonsense!" began Mrs. Page Reid. But after one doubting, disbelieving look, she saw that it was so. Catching Blanche's hand, she drew her forcibly away, and when they had gained the high road, burst into a long, low laugh.

"Don't think about it, dear," she said to Blanche. "It's nothing. The best of husbands like to amuse themselves behind our backs."

"Perhaps he was—was—inquiring the way—or something," hazarded Blanche, whose breath was coming rather faster than usual.

Mrs. Page Reid nearly choked. "Oh, to be sure!" she cried, when she could speak.

"You don't think so? You think it was—something else?"

"You are only a little goose, my dear, in the ways of the world," rejoined Mrs. Page Reid. "Where's the man that does not like to talk with a pretty woman? Lord Level, of all others, does."

"*He* does?"

"Well, he used to do so. Of course he has mended his manners. And the women, mind you, liked to talk to him. But don't take up the notion, please, that by saying that I insinuate any unorthodox talking," added Mrs. Page Reid as an afterthought, when she caught a look at Lady Level's tell-tale countenance.

"I shall ask Lord Level——"

"*Say nothing*," impressively spoke the elder lady, cutting short the words. "Say nothing to your husband. Take my advice, Lady Level, for it is good. There is no mortal sin a wife can commit so

repugnant in her husband's eyes as that of spying upon his actions. It would make him detest her in the long run."

"But I was not spying. We saw it by accident."

"All the same. Let it pass from your mind as though it had never been."

Blanche was dubious. *If* there was no harm, why should she not speak of it?—and she could not think there was harm. And if there *was*—why she would not have breathed it to him for the world. Dismissing the subject, she and Mrs. Page Reid sat down to a quiet game at cards. When Lord Level came in, their visitor said good-night.

Blanche sat on in silence and torment. Should she speak, or should she not? Lord Level seemed buried in a reverie.

"Archibald," she presently began.

"Yes," he answered, rousing himself.

"I—we—I and Mrs. Page Reid went out for a little walk in the moonlight. And——"

"Well, my dear?"

"We saw you," Blanche was wishing to say; but somehow her courage failed her. Her breath was coming in gasps, her throat was beating.

"And it was very pleasant," she went on. "As warm and light as day."

"Just so," said Lord Level. "But the night air is treacherous, apt to bring fever. Do not go out again in it, love."

So her effort to speak had failed. And the silence only caused her to think the more. Blanche Level would have given her best diamond ear-rings to know who that person was in the gold ones.

An evening or two further on, when she was quite alone, Lord Level having again strolled out, she threw on the same fleecy shawl and betook herself down the road to the cottage in the grove—the cottage that looked like a pretty bower in the evergreens. And—yes——

Well, it was a strange thing—a startling thing; startling, anyway, to poor Blanche Level's heart; but there, on the self-same bench, side by side, sat Lord Level and the Italian girl. Her face looked more beautiful than before to the young wife's jealous eyes; the gold ear-rings glittered and sparkled in the moonlight. He and she were conversing in a low voice of earnestness, and Lord Level was smoking a cigar.

Blanche stood rooted to the spot, shivering a little as she peered through the myrtle hedge; but never moving. Presently the young woman lifted her head, called out "Si," and went indoors, evidently in answer to a summons.

"Nina," sang out Lord Level. "Nina"—raising his voice higher—"I have left my cigar-case on the table; bring it to me when you come out again."

He spoke in English. The next minute the girl returned, cigar-case in hand. She took her place by his side, as before, and they fell to talking again.

Lady Level drew away. She went home with flagging steps and a bitterly rebellious heart.

Not to her husband would she speak; her haughty lips were sealed to him—and should be ever, she resolved in her new pain. But she gave a hint the next day of what she had again seen to Mrs. Page Reid.

That lady only laughed. To her mind it was altogether a rich joke. Not only the affair itself, but Blanche's ideas upon it.

"My dear Lady Level," she rejoined, "as I said before, you are very ignorant of the ways of the world. I assure you our husbands like to chatter to others as well as to us. Nothing wrong, of course, you understand; the mistake is, if we so misconstrue it. Lord Level is a very attractive man, you know, and has had all sorts of escapades."

"I never knew that he had had them."

"Well, it is hardly likely he would tell you of them before you were his wife. He will tell you fast enough some day."

"Won't you tell me some of them now?"

Blanche was speaking very equably, as if worldly wisdom had come to her all at once; and Mrs. Page Reid began to ransack her memory for this, that, or the other that she might have heard of Lord Level. As tales of scandal never lose by carrying, she probably converted mole-hills into mountains; most assuredly so to Blanche's mind. Anyway, she had better have held her tongue.

From that time, what with one doubt and another, Lady Level's regard for her lord was changed. Her feeling towards him became most bitter. Resentment?—indignation?—neither is an adequate word for it.

At the week's end they left Pisa, for the month was up, and travelled back by easy stages to Savoy. Blanche wanted to go direct to England, but Lord Level objected: he said she had not yet seen enough of Switzerland. It was in Savoy that her illness came on—the mal du pays, as they called it. When she grew better, they started towards home; travelling slowly and halting at every available spot. That his wife's manner had changed to him, Lord Level could only perceive, but he had no suspicion of its cause. He put it down to her anger at his keeping her so long away from England.

The morning after they arrived at the inn in Germany (of which mention has been made) Lord Level received a letter, which seemed to disturb him. It was forwarded to him by a banker in Paris, to whom at present all his letters were addressed. Telling Blanche that it contained news of some matter of business upon which he must start for London without delay, he departed; declining to

listen to her prayer that she might accompany him, but promising to return for her shortly. It was at that inn that Arnold Ravensworth and his wife found Lady Level: and it was with them she journeyed to England.

And here we must give a few words to Lord Level himself. He crossed the Channel by the night mail to Dover, and reached London soon after daybreak. In the course of the day he called at his bankers', Messrs. Coutts and Co., to inquire for letters: orders having now been given by him to Paris to forward them to London. One only awaited him, which had only just then come in.

As Lord Level read it, he gave utterance to a word of vexation. For it told him that the matter of business upon which he had hurried over was put off for a week: and he found that he might just as well have remained in Germany.

The first thought that crossed his mind was—should he return to his wife? But it was hardly worth while doing so. So he took rooms in Holles Street, at a comfortable house, where he had lodged before, and looked up friends and acquaintances at his club. But he did not let that first day pass without calling on Charles Strange.

The afternoon was drawing to an end in Essex Street, and Charles was in his own private room, all his faculties given to a deed, when Lord Level was shown in. It was for Charles he asked, not for Mr. Brightman.

"What an awful business this is!" began his lordship, when greetings had passed.

Charles lifted his hands in dismay. No need to ask whom the remark applied to: or to mention by name poor Tom Heriot.

"Could *nothing* be done, Mr. Strange?" demanded the peer in his coldest and haughtiest tones. "Were there *no* means that could have been taken to avert exposure?"

"Yes, I think there might have been, but for Tom's own careless folly: and that's the most galling part of it," returned Charles. "Had he only made a confidant of me beforehand, we should have had a try for it. If I could not have found the money myself, Mr. Brightman would have done so."

"You need only have applied to me," said Lord Level. "I should not have cared how much I paid—to prevent exposure."

"But in his carelessness, you see, he never applied to anyone; he allowed the blow to fall upon him, and then it was too late ——"

"Was he a fool?" interjected Lord Level.

"There is this excuse for his not speaking: he did not know that things were so bad, or that the people would proceed to extremities."

The peer drew in his haughty lips. "Did he tell you that pretty fable?"

"Believe this much, Lord Level: what Tom *said*, he *thought*. Anyone more reprehensibly light and heedless I do not know, but he is incapable of falsehood. And in saying that he did not

expect so grave a charge, or believe there were any grounds on which it could be made, I am sure he spoke only the truth. He was drawn in by one Anstey, and ——"

"I read the reports of the trial," interrupted Lord Level. "Do not be at the pain of going over the details again."

"Well, the true culprit was Anstey; there's no doubt of that. But, like most cunning rogues, he was able to escape consequences himself, and throw them upon Tom. I am sure, Lord Level, that Tom Heriot no more knew the bill was forged than I knew it. He knew well enough there was something shady about it; about that and others which had been previously in circulation, and had been met when they came to maturity. This one bill was different. Of course there's all the difference between shady bills of accommodation, and a bill that has a responsible man's name to it, which he never signed himself."

"But what on earth possessed Heriot to allow himself to be drawn into such toils?"

"Ah, there it is. His carelessness. He has been reprehensibly careless all his life. And now he has paid for it. All's over."

"He is already on his passage out in the convict ship *Vengeance*, is he not?" said Lord Level, with suppressed rage.

"Yes: ever since early in August," shuddered Charles. "How does Blanche bear it?"

"Blanche does not know it."

"Not know it!"

"No. As yet I have managed to keep it from her. I dread its reaching her, and that's the truth. It is a fearful disgrace. She is fond of him, and would feel it keenly."

"But I cannot understand how it can have been kept from her."

"Well, it has been. Why, she does not even know that he sold out! She thinks he embarked with the regiment for India last May! We had been in Paris about ten days—after our marriage, you know—when one morning, happening to take up the *Times*, I saw in it the account of his apprehension and first examination. They had his name in as large as life; Thomas Heriot. 'Some gross calumny,' I thought; 'Blanche must not hear of this:' and I gave orders for continuing our journey that same day. However, I soon found that it was not a calumny: other examinations took place, and he was committed for trial. I kept my wife away from all places likely to be frequented by the English, lest a word should be dropped to her: and as yet, as I tell you, she knows nothing of it. She is very angry with me in her heart, I can see, for taking her to secluded places, and for keeping her away from England so long, but this has been my sole motive. I want the thought of it to die out of people's minds before I bring her home."

"She is not with you, then?"

"She is in Germany. I had to hasten over here upon a matter of

business, and shall return for her when it is finished. I have taken my old rooms in Holles Street for a week. You must look me up there."

"I will," said Charles.

Mr. Brightman came in then, and the trouble was gone over again. Lord Level felt it keenly; there could be no doubt of that. He inquired of the older and more experienced lawyer whether there was any chance of bringing Anstey to a reckoning, so that he might be punished; and as to any expense, great or small, that might be incurred in the process, his lordship added, he would give carte blanche for that with greater delight than he had given money for anything in his whole life.

Charles could not help liking him. With all his pride and his imputed faults, few people could help liking Lord Level.

Meanwhile, as may have been gathered in the last chapter, Lord Level was detained in England longer than he had thought for. Lady Level grew impatient, and more impatient at the delay: and then, taking the reins into her own hands, she crossed the Channel with Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Ravensworth.

CHAPTER IX.

COMPLICATIONS.

Crossing by the night boat from Calais, the travellers reached Dover at a very early hour of the morning. Lady Level, with her servants, proceeded at once to London; but Mrs. Ravensworth, who had been exceedingly ill on the passage, required some repose, and she and her husband waited for a later train.

"Make use of our house, Lady Level," said Mr. Ravensworth—speaking of his new abode in Portland Place. "The servants are expecting me and their mistress, and will have all things in readiness, and make you comfortable."

"Thank you all the same, Arnold," said Lady Level; "but I shall drive straight to my husband's rooms in Holles Street."

"I would not—if I were you," he dissented. "You are not expected, and may not find anything ready in lodgings, so early in the morning. Drive first to my house and have some breakfast. You can go on to Holles Street afterwards."

Sensible advice. And Lady Level took it.

In the evening of that same day, Arnold Ravensworth and his wife reached Portland Place from the London terminus. To Mr. Ravensworth's surprise, who should be swinging from the door as the cab stopped but Major Carlen in his favourite purple and scarlet cloak, his grey hair disordered and his eyes exceeding fierce.

"Here's a pretty kettle-of-fish!" cried he, scarcely giving Arnold

time to hand out his wife, and following him into the hall. "*You* have done a nice thing!"

"What is amiss?" asked Mr. Ravensworth, as he took the Major into a sitting-room.

"Amiss!" returned the excited Major. "I'd advise you not to fall into Level's way just now. How the mischief came you to bring Blanche over?"

"We accompanied Lady Level to England at her request: I took no part in influencing her decision. Lady Level is her own mistress."

"Is she, though! She'll find she's not, if she begins to act in opposition to her husband. Before she was married, she had not a wish of her own, let alone a will—and there's where Level was caught, I fancy," added the Major, in a parenthesis, nodding his head knowingly. "He thought he had picked up a docile child, who would never be in his way. What with that and her beauty—anyway, he could not think she would be setting up a will, and an obstinate one, as she's doing now, rely upon that."

Major Carlen was striding from one end of the room to the other, his cloak catching in the furniture, as he swayed about. Arnold thought he had been drinking: but he was a man who could take a great deal, and show it very little.

"The case is this," said he, unfastening the troublesome cloak, and flinging it on to a chair. "Level has been in England a week or two; amusing himself, I take it. He didn't want his wife, I suppose; well and good: men like a little society, and as long as they keep their wives in the dark, there's no reason why they shouldn't have it ——"

"Major Carlen!" burst forth Mr. Ravensworth, "Lord Level's wife is your daughter. Have you forgotten it?"

"My step-daughter. What if she is? Does that render her different from others? Are you going to climb a pole and cry Morality? You are a young married man, Arnold Ravensworth, and must be on your good behaviour just now; it's etiquette."

Mr. Ravensworth was not easily excited, but the red flush of anger darkened his cheek. He could have thrust the old rascal from the house.

"Level leaves his wife in France, and tells her to remain there. Germany? Well, say Germany, then. My lady chooses to disobey, and comes to England, under your wing: and I wish old Harry had driven you to any place rather than the one she was stopping at. She reaches town to-day, and drives to Lord Level's rooms in Holles Street, whence he had dated his letters to her—and a model of incaution he was for doing it; why couldn't he have dated from his club? My lady finds or hears of something there she does not like. Well, what could she expect? They were his rooms; taken for himself, not for her; and if she had not been a greater simpleton than ever broke loose from keeping, she would have come away, then and there. Not she. She must persist in putting questions as to this and that; so

at last she learned the truth, I suppose, or something near it. Then she thought it time to leave the house and come to mine: which is what she ought to have done at first: and there she has been waiting until now to see me, for I have been out all day."

"I thought your house was let?"

"It was let for the season; the people have left it now. I came home only yesterday from Jersey. My sister is lying ill there."

"And may I ask, Major Carlen, how you know that Lord Level has been 'amusing himself' if you have not been here to see?" questioned Mr. Ravensworth sarcastically.

"How do I know it? — why, common sense tells me," stormed the Major. "I have not heard a word about Level, except what Blanche says."

"Is he in Holles Street?"

"Not now. He gave up the rooms a week ago, and went down to Marshdale, his place in Surrey. He is laid up there, having managed to jam his knee against a gate-post; his horse swerved in going through it. A man I met to-day, a friend of Level's, told me so. To go back to Blanche. She opened out an indignant tale to me, when I got home just now and found her there, of what she had heard in Holles Street. 'Serve you right, my dear,' I said to her: 'a wife has no business to be looking at her husband through a telescope. If a man chose to fill his rooms with wild tigers, it would not be his wife's province to complain, provided he kept her out of reach of their claws.' 'But what am I to do?' cried Blanche. 'You must return to France, or wherever else you came from,' I answered. 'That I never will: I shall go down to Marshdale, to Lord Level,' asserted Blanche, looking as I had never seen her look before. 'You can't go there,' I said; 'you must not attempt it.' 'I tell you, papa, I will go,' she cried, her eyes flashing. I never knew she had so much passion in her, Ravensworth: Level must have changed her nature. 'I will have an explanation from Lord Level,' she continued. 'Rather than live on as I am living now, I will demand a separation.'—Now, did you put that into her head?" broke off the Major, looking at Mr. Ravensworth.

"I do not think you know what you are saying, Major Carlen. Should I be likely to advise Lady Level to separate from her husband?"

"Someone has; such an idea would never enter Blanche's head unless put there. 'You must lend me the means to go down,' she went on. 'I am quite without money, through paying the bill at the hotel: Mr. Ravensworth had partly to supply my travelling expenses.' 'Then more fool Ravensworth, for doing it,' said I; and more fool you were," repeated the Major.

"Anything more, Major?"

"The idea of my lending her money to take her down to Marshdale! And she'd be cunning to get money from me, just now, for I

am out at all pockets. The last supplies I had came from Level ; I wrote to him when he was abroad. By Jove! I would not cross him now for the universe."

"The selfish old sinner!" thought Mr. Ravensworth—and nearly said so aloud.

"Let me finish ; she'll be here in a minute ; she said she should come and apply to you. 'Does your husband beat you, or ill-treat you?' I asked her. 'No,' said she, shaking her head in a proud fury, 'even I would not submit to that. Will you lend me some money, papa?' she asked again. 'No, I won't,' I said. 'Then I'll borrow it from Mr. Ravensworth,' she cried, and ran upstairs to put her bonnet on. So then I thought it was time to come too, and explain. Mind you don't supply her with any, Ravensworth."

"What pretext can I have for refusing?"

"Pretext be shot!" irritably returned the Major. "Tell her you won't, as I do. I forbid you to lend her any. There she is! what a passionate knock! Been blundering up wrong turnings, I daresay."

Lady Level came in, looking tired, heated, frightened. Mr. Ravensworth took her hand.

"You have been walking here!" he said. "It is not right that Lady Level should be abroad in London streets at night, and alone."

"What else am I to do without money?" she returned hysterically.

"I sent the servants and the luggage to an hotel this morning and gave them the few shillings I had left."

"Do sit down and calm yourself. All this is truly distressing."

Calm herself! The emotion, so long pent up, broke forth into sobs. "Yes, it is distressing. I come to England and I find no home ; I am driven about from pillar to post, insulted everywhere ; I have to walk through the streets, like any poor, helpless girl. Is it right that it should be so?"

"You have brought it all upon yourself, my lady," cried Major Carlen, coming forward from a dark corner.

She turned with a start. "So you are here, papa! Then I hope you have entered into sufficient explanation to spare it to me."

"I have told Ravensworth of your fine exploit, in going to Lord Level's rooms: and he agrees with me that no one, except an inexperienced child, would have done it."

"The truth, if you please, Major Carlen," struck in Mr. Ravensworth.

"And that what you heard or met with—though as to what it was I'm sure I'm all in a fog about—served you right for going," continued the unabashed Major.

Lady Level threw back her head, the haughty crimson dyeing her cheeks. "I went there expecting to find my husband ; was that an inexperienced or a childish action?"

"Yes, it was," roared the Major, completely losing his temper, and

showing his fierce teeth. "When men are away from their wives, they fall back into bachelor habits. If they please to turn their sanctums into smoking dens, or boxing dens, or what not, are you to come hunting them up, as I say, with a spyglass that magnifies at both ends?"

"Good men have no need to keep their wives away from them."

The Major gave his nose a twist. "Good men?—bad men?—where's the difference? The good have their wives under their thumb, and the bad haven't, that's all."

"For shame, papa!"

"Tie Lord Level to your apron-string, and keep him there as long as you can," fired the Major; "but don't ferret him up when he is out for a holiday."

"Did I want to ferret up Lord Level?" she retorted. "I went there because I thought it was his temporary home and would be mine. Why did he date his letters thence?"

"There it all lies," cried the Major, changing his tone to one of wrath against the peer. "Better he had dated from the top of the Monument. It is surprising what mistakes men make sometimes. But how was he to think you would come over against his expressed will? You say he had bade you stop there until he could fetch you."

Lady Level would not reply: the respect due to Major Carlen as her step-father was not in the ascendant just then. Turning to Mr. Ravensworth, she requested the loan of sufficient funds to take her down to Marshdale.

"I tell you, Blanche, you must not go there," interrupted the Major. "Better not. Lord Level does not receive strangers at Marshdale."

"Strangers!" emphatically repeated Lady Level.

"Or wives either. They are the same as strangers in a case such as this. I assure you Level told me, long before he married you, that Marshdale was a little secluded place, no establishment kept up in it, except an old servant or two; that he never received company down there, and should never take you to it. Remain at the hotel with your servants, if you will not come to my house, Blanche—there's only a charwoman in it at present, as you know. Then write to Level and let him know that you are there."

"Lady Level had better stay here to-night, at all events," put in Arnold Ravensworth. "My wife is expecting her to do so."

"Ay," acquiesced the old Major: "and write to Marshdale to-morrow, Blanche."

"I go down to Marshdale to-morrow," she replied in a tone of determination. "It is too late to go to-night. The old servants that wait upon Lord Level can wait upon me: and if there are none, I will wait upon him myself. Go there I will, and have an understanding. And, unless Lord Level can explain away the aspect that things have taken, I—I—I ——"

"Of all the imbeciles that ever gave utterance to folly, you are the worst," was the Major's complimentary retort, when she broke down. "Madam, do you know that you are a peeress of the realm?" he added, pompously.

"I do not forget it."

"And you would stand in your own light! You have carriages and finery; you are to be presented next season; you will then have a house in town: what does the earth contain more that you *can* want?"

"Happiness," said Lady Level.

"Happiness!" repeated the Major, in genuine astonishment. "A pity but you had married a country curate and found it, then. Arnold Ravensworth, you must not lend Lady Level the money she desires; you shall not speed her on this insane journey."

Mr. Ravensworth approached him, and spoke in a low tone. "Do you know of any existing reason that may render it inexpedient for her to go there?"

"I know nothing about it," replied the Major, too angry to lower his voice; "absolutely nothing. The Queen and all the princesses might pay it a visit, for aught I know of any reason to the contrary. But it is not Lady Level's place to follow her husband about in this clandestine manner. If he wants her there, he will send for her, once he knows that she is in London. The place is not much more than a farm, I believe, and used to be a hunting-box in the late Lord Level's time."

"Papa, I hope you will forgive me for running counter to your advice—but I shall certainly go down into Surrey to-morrow."

"I wash my hands of it altogether," said the angry Major.

"And you must lend me the money, Arnold."

"I will not refuse you," was his answer: "and I cannot dictate to you; but I think it would be better for you to remain here, and let Lord Level know that you are coming."

Lady Level shook her head. "Good advice, Arnold, no doubt, and I thank you; all the same, I shall go down as I have said."

"You will be very much to blame, sir, if you help on this mad scheme by so much as a sixpence," spoke the Major.

"Papa, listen to a word of common sense," she interposed. "I could go to a dozen places to-morrow, and get any amount of money. I could go to Lord Level's agents, and say, I am Lady Level, and they would supply me. I could go to Mr. Brightman, and he would supply me—Charles Strange is in Paris again. I could go to other places. But I prefer to have it from Mr. Ravensworth, and save myself trouble and annoyance. It is not a pleasant thing for a peeress of the realm—as you just now put it—to go about borrowing a five-pound note," she concluded with a faint smile.

"Very well, Blanche. If ill comes of this wild step of yours, remember you were warned against it. I can say no more."

Gathering up his cloak as he spoke, Major Carlen threw it over his shoulders, and went forth, muttering, into the night.

Mr. Ravensworth called his wife, and she took Lady Level upstairs to a hastily-prepared chamber. Sitting down in a low chair, and throwing off her bonnet, Lady Level, worn out with all the excitement she had gone through, burst into a flood of hysterical tears.

"Tell me all about it," said Mary Ravensworth soothingly, drawing the poor wearied head to rest on her shoulder.

"They meant to stop me from going down to my husband, and I *will* go," sobbed Blanche, half defiantly. "If he has met with an accident, and is ill, I ought to be there."

"Of course you ought," said Mary warmly. "But what is all the trouble about?—And what was it that you heard, and did not like, in Holles Street?"

"Oh, never mind that," said Blanche, colouring furiously. "That is what I am going to ask my husband to explain."

Upon Lady's Level's arrival in London that morning, she sent her servants and luggage to an hotel, and drove straight to Portland Place herself: where Mr. and Mrs. Ravensworth's servants supplied her with breakfast. Afterwards, she went to Holles Street; arriving there about ten o'clock; walked into the passage, for the house door was open, was met by a young person in green, and inquired for Lord Level.

"Lord Level's not here now, ma'am," was the answer, as she showed Blanche into a parlour. "He has been gone about a week."

"Gone about a week!" repeated Blanche, completely taken back; for she had pictured him as lying at the place disabled.

"About that time, ma'am. He and the lady left together."

Blanche stared, and collected her scattered senses. "What lady?" she asked.

The young person in green considered. "Well, ma'am, I forget the name just now; those foreign names are hard to remember. His lordship called her Nina. A very handsome lady, she was—Italian, I think—with long gold ear-rings."

Lady Level's heart began to beat loudly. "May I ask if you are Mrs. Pratt?" she inquired, knowing that to be the name of the landlady.

"Dear me, no, ma'am; Mrs. Pratt's my aunt; I'm up here on a visit to her from the country. She is gone out to do her marketings. Lord Level was going down to his seat in Surrey, we understood, when he left here."

"Was the Italian lady going with him?"

The country girl—who was no doubt an inexperienced, simple country maiden, or she might not have talked so freely—shook her head. "We don't know anything about that, ma'am: she might have been. She was related to my lord—his sister-in-law, I think he called her to Mrs. Pratt—or some relation of that sort."

Blanche walked to the window and stood still for a moment, looking into the street, getting up her breath. "Did the lady stay with Lord Level all the time he was here?" she questioned, presently.

"Oh, no, ma'am; she came only the day before he went away. Or, stay—the day but one before, I think it was. Yes; for I know they were out together nearly all the intervening day. Mrs. Pratt thought at his lordship's solicitor's. It was about six o'clock in the evening when she first arrived. My lord had spoken to Mrs. Pratt that day in his drawing-room, saying he was expecting a relative from Italy for a day or two, and could we let her have a bedroom, and any other accommodation she might need; and Mrs. Pratt said she would, for we were not full. A very nice lady she seemed to be, ma'am, and spoke English in a very pretty manner."

Lady Level drew in her contemptuous lips. "Did Lord Level meet with any accident while he was here?"

"Accident, ma'am! Not that we heard of. He was quite well when he left."

"Thank you," said Blanche, turning away and drawing her mantle up with a shiver. "As Lord Level is not here, I will not intrude upon you further."

Wishing the young person in green good morning, she went away to Gloucester Place, feeling that she must scream or cry, or fight the air. Blanche knew Major Carlen was about due in London, as his house was vacant again. Yes, the old charwoman said, the Major had got home the previous day, but he had just gone out—would my lady (for she knew Blanche) like to walk in and wait until he returned.

My lady did so; and had to wait until the evening. Then she partly explained to Major Carlen, and partly confused him; causing that gentleman to take up all kinds of free and easy ideas, as to the morals and manners of my Lord Level.

On the following morning Lady Level, pursuing her own sweet will, took train for Marshdale, leaving her servants behind her. But for the account of the curious place she discovered the house to be, and the elements of mystery it seemed to contain, we must wait until next month.

(To be continued.)

In Memoriam.

FEBRUARY 10TH, 1887.

SHE sleeps in peace the gentle and the wise,
Who woke at will the nation's smiles and tears;
The Light of Truth shone in those earnest eyes,
Whose steadfast beams defied the passing years;
A throne of noble thought, that ample brow
Doth wear the crown of the immortal now!

Still ripples on the crystal fount of love,
Which flowed spontaneous from that generous heart,
Sweet as the cooing of the tender dove,
Soft as the sigh when whispering lovers part.
Still the fair children of her glowing brain
Bear witness to a life not lived in vain!

Children of our own world, we know them well,
Not in ethereal robes, but nature's dress:
Lovely, but oh, so frail! poor ISABEL
Falls, and we weep, yet cannot love her less!
That sorrowing mother's yearning love we know,
Mingle with hers our tears, and share her woe!

Dear ROLAND YORKE! how oft his honest face,
When in the presence of some trusted friend,
Smiles into ours from its familiar place,
While with our own his genial accents blend!
The author's dream, part of our life has grown
A living, breathing presence all our own!

Another form in fancy we behold,
Rough and uncouth, more loved than all the rest!
A fount of beauty is the heart of gold,
Which beats so truly in that kindly breast!
We must, when we behold poor simple JAN,
Rejoice that GOD created such a man!

She is not dead, the gifted and the pure!
Fresh as the balmy breath of summer flowers,
While noble deeds and holy thoughts endure,
In her creations she is ever ours!
Lives in her works no thought for man to blame,
Or dim the lustre of her honoured name!

F.

IN ABUNDANCE.

By Agnes Giberne, Author of "Sun, Moon and Stars," "The World's Foundations," etc.

A DULL morning; the sky low and grey; the lanes muddy and deserted; the one range of hills commonly to be seen cut off by mist—one would hardly have expected such a scene to call up thoughts of beauty.

Yet Nature spoke in clear tones that day, and brought home to me one lesson—as to the royal abundance and plenty of things on earth. Clear tones, but low and simple ones. For Nature's speech came through no grander medium than rain-drops and spiders' webs.

The extraordinary number of those webs and the amount of crystal drops clinging to them must really have been seen to be imagined. I have never come across quite the same anywhere else.

Heavy rain had lasted for hours; and though actual rain was at an end, every turf and leaf glistened still with moisture, which the reeking atmosphere had no power to carry away. My walk was through dull lanes, in a dull country, with dull hedges on either side. Truth to tell, I did not expect to find anything except dulness ahead—more especially in the hedges. I found my mistake, however.

For all over the hedges were scattered spiders' webs, literally to be counted by hundreds: and all over the webs were delicate drops of water, literally in thousands—round pearly drops, pure and bright, like gems.

They were arranged as gems too, in the most ornate and fanciful groupings. Nature is given to doing things gracefully in her domain; quite as gracefully as mankind ever manages to do them, and a good deal more profusely.

So there were belts and rows of translucent drops, necklets and pendants in abundance. Here was a glistening festoon; there a tiara fit for a queen; yonder a string of shining gems; yet again a complex and elaborate interlacing, which a jeweller might envy. Grace and beauty existed to an extent which the highest art might not rival. One touch, and a whole frail structure of jewels was gone; merely the dull groundwork of spiders' web remaining. But another and another structure lay beyond.

Dull groundwork of a spider's web! Well, yes; dull certainly to these unseeing eyes of ours; though even we can appreciate the pretty and curious spiral arrangement, by means of which the wary spider "first catches his hare," and so on.

But just think what is really meant by these hundreds of fragile

webs, these thousands of fine silk strands, woven into the wheels and circles and festoons upon which the pearly rain-drops have made so fair a show.

A silkworm's spinning is a wonder; but the spider's spinning quite surpasses that of the fat, greedy silkworm. For the silkworm produces only one single thread of fine silk: whereas the spider's slender rope is of really complicated make. In his little spinning-machine—a "spinneret" it is called, and he has generally two or three spinnerets—there is an astonishing number of tiny tubes, from each one of which flows the sticky fluid, hardening at once on exposure to the air into silk.

One kind of spider has about three hundred tubes to each spinneret: these three hundred delicate cords being the separate strands of the rope which forms the web. Startling enough that! But the garden-spider actually has over one thousand tubes to a spinneret. Think what the fineness of those strands must be, when a thousand of them joined together make so light and silken a line.

So much for one walk, and what might be seen in the course of it. Now for another.

A summer day this time; green downs in bright sunshine; blue sky overhead, and pretty, undulating country around. Nature in a more hopeful mood.

Almost everything looks pretty in sunshine. The world seemed very full that summer day: full of light, full of beauty, full of life. There were plenty of cobwebs too, though not of rain-drops; and the very cobwebs had a joyous and jaunty air, having laid aside their dinginess. The birds could hardly contain themselves with glee; insects flitted to and fro incessantly; trees were one mass of green; and any amount of flowers could be had by searching.

But it dawned upon me how very small a portion of that which *is* in this full and busy world of ours can be seen and heard by our dim eyes and dull ears. Earth's abundance means unspeakably more than can be grasped at a glance; and at the most we never hear more than a few notes of the great chorus of voices. More than all, perhaps, in the matter of sight our powers are defective; for we think we see so much, yet it is so little! Little, I mean, compared with what lies beyond our vision.

When night comes, and we look into the dark sky, we perceive what we are pleased to call "countless" points of light. Yet after all, such a view is the merest A B C of the great reality. Some two or three thousand stars may be observed thus, and we quite rightly think that wonderful. Let us look, however, at the same dark sky through a large telescope; and at once the numbers of twinkling points spring from thousands to millions, with any amount of possibilities always beyond. One little patch of sky, with perhaps a dozen faint stars visible to the naked eye, will display hundreds, if not thousands, to telescopic sight.

And just exactly as it is with things in the sky, so it is with things on earth.

Only in the one case we use a magnifying glass called a telescope; in the other we use a magnifying glass called a microscope. In the one case we have to bring nearer what lies very far away; in the other we have to make larger what is exceedingly small.

But in both cases the results are much alike. In both cases whole worlds of wonder and beauty await examination. In both cases, with added powers of sight, marvel follows marvel, mystery succeeds mystery. In both cases we come upon the same extraordinary abundance, the same multitudinousness of being; the same endless degrees of glory and finish; never finding a limit except that of our own limited powers to see and know.

The earth as we do see it, and the earth as we might see it with magnified vision, are two different things; different as the little patch of sky dotted by a dozen stars from the same patch glittering with two or three thousand points of light; different as the single dark line of a spider's web from that same line separated into the thousand strands of which it is woven.

Suppose, some fair day, you and I could start upon a ramble, suddenly gifted with eyesight equal to that bestowed by a moderately powerful magnifying glass.

What a strange world we should find all around us.

The brightness and the largeness of everything would strike us first: the dazzling blaze of light; the clearness of outline; the beauty and delicacy where we have been wont to see coarseness and ugliness; the abundance of life where we have believed emptiness to reign. These would grow upon us, moment by moment, till we should feel that our life had been passed in half-blindness, and that the rest of life would be all too short for the delight of seeing.

In that sunny walk upon country downs, I gathered from among the grass-blades a tiny flower; most insignificant in kind. But I had with me a good magnifying glass; and suddenly the small commonplace thing was changed into an exquisite blossom, rivalling the wax-like heath blossoms of greenhouse cultivation. One spray had spotless white petals; another showed a rosy flush at each tip.

Usually, of course, one would pass all this loveliness by, as if it were not. One would pass it, not so much out of carelessness, as from sheer lack of eyesight.

Look at an ordinary daisy. Hundreds and thousands of daisies grow in all directions, and children love them, while some grown-up people do not disdain them.

I wonder how many, either of the children or their elders, know that the "bonnie wee crimson-tipped flower," with its yellow eye and its white crown of rays, is not a flower. It really is a "flower-head;" a mass of minute flowers or florets; a bouquet of tiny blossoms, all

springing from one common foundation. A single daisy will contain as many as two or three hundred small flowers. No despicable nosegay: only it is not big enough to meet the wants of our dim sight and our large clumsy grasp.

Again; look at the leaves of a tree. How many do you think there are on a single tree—or in a forest—or in the world?

Green foliage is pleasant to the eyes en masse; and a good many people never see it at all except en masse, somewhat after the fashion of a certain school of artists, who reckon a green smudge quite a fair representation of a tree.

Gather a leaf, and hold it towards the sunlight, with a magnifying glass in your other hand. Oh, but it is fair in plan and colouring, that delicate network of branching veins, with the filling-up of translucent green between!

With stronger sight we might see the delicate skin on either side; we might examine the soft green mass of cells, and detect imbedded spirals; we might find the veins to be tiny channels for the flow of living sap; we might have a glimpse of the breathing-holes, those countless minute pores with which every leaf is furnished for the letting out of moisture. Not quite countless either, since the underside of a vine-leaf is known to have some thirteen thousand little mouths to the square inch: while a leaf of the lilac boasts no less than one hundred and sixty thousand in the same space.

Talking of country walks, and of the abundance which exists even where we cannot see, why not finish with a glance into some neighbouring pond?

Not a mere passing glance at the surface of the stagnant water, but a microscopic and suggestive gaze. We shall not need to examine the whole pond. One drop of the water will do—with the help of a lens.

And behold! In a moment, a whole new tiny world of life and activity opens out before us!

For here are animals by the score: animals alive—though so minute as to be invisible to the naked eye—very much alive, indeed, too. Here are creatures long in shape, round in shape, changeable in shape: creatures with red eyes and creatures with no eyes: creatures with tails and creatures without tails: creatures which are mere dots of rolling jelly, and creatures which have well-developed organs: creatures like snakes and creatures like flowers: creatures coming into existence, living out their tiny lives, and giving place to others!

All this in one water-drop! But what of ten thousand other water-drops in that same pond? And what of all the world outside that pond?

So the lesson taught by rain-drops on spiders' webs was not contradicted by a water-drop from the stagnant pond.

MY NIECE'S JEWELS:

An Episode in the Life of a Single Woman.

By Ella Edersheim.

IT is a long time ago that the strange events took place which I am now about to record.

I have, indeed, always felt that the incident was too curious to be confined to the knowledge of Tom and myself alone. But I am sure that my readers on ending this recital will sympathise with me in the reserve which has kept me silent for so many years. So long as that gentle creature Lucy lived, it was impossible for me to publish what might inadvertently have come under her notice. In such a case she would have been caused even more pain and surprise than she was made to suffer in her husband's lifetime; and it was my continual endeavour to make the last years of her life run smoothly. This, and this reason alone, prevented me from exposing at the time what Tom at once characterised as a most impudent and clumsy fraud. But it is now five years since I planted the cross of snowdrops on poor Lucy's grave, and there is no longer any reason for keeping silence.

Those five years have passed slowly. It is not often that exciting events disturb the quiet current of a single woman's life; more especially if she be, as I have always prided myself on being, a person of a quiet disposition, with no anxiety for a share in her neighbour's concerns. Lucy and Tom were my only near relations. Tom is of necessity much occupied with his profession, and Lucy—though at the time I grieve to own that I often complained to myself of the intrusion of my poor niece on my placid, perhaps selfish, life—I have missed sadly since her death. She returned from Australia to live with me but a year after they had left England, and she only survived her husband by another two years. She seemed to be able to find no interest in life, and just moped away.

And now I, too, sometimes feel lonely.

But Tom has warned me not to be garrulous, and I had better begin at once to tell my story in an orderly and methodical manner. Simplicity of style and a close adherence to facts will, he says, greatly decrease the difficulties of my task, and may possibly predispose in my favour the Authorities of that mysterious Office whither he will carry my MS.

If I could but be quite—quite sure that poor Lucy cannot know what I am going to write!

Some ten years ago a letter reached me one morning, in my

pleasant country-home in the south-west of England, which caused me considerable anxiety.

I should state that a few years before, my only sister's orphan child, Lucy—so called after her sweet mother—had married a country clergyman in the north. It was a marriage of which I in no way approved. But Lucy was as obstinate as most weak people can contrive to be, and I have always held it unwise, as well as useless, when once a girl is over age, to attempt to thwart her in a love-affair. She had met Loftus Tracey under circumstances which, in her place, I should have thought both undignified and unromantic. But then in this case I was not allowed to be the judge.

She had worried me into allowing her to join some friends who were forming part of a "personally-conducted tour" to Paris and through parts of France. It was one of the first attempts of the kind, and the members had to bear a great deal of derision from their friends. I endeavoured to do my part both with persuasion and mockery; but Lucy was always insensible to ridicule, and as she had her own money, I really had no power, as well as no right, to absolutely control her.

So she went, and Loftus Tracey was another of the party, and they made it up, going in a break to Versailles, I believe. At least, she said so. In any case they came back engaged, and, in spite of my opposition, a few weeks afterwards they were married. He took her back to his parish in Yorkshire, and I saw no more of her till the visit which I shall soon describe.

At first I received very cheerful reports from the newly-married pair. Lucy wrote in high spirits, vastly delighted with her new home and possessions, and full of evident importance in being a married woman, poor thing! Loftus was all that was perfect: so attentive and devoted; which, considering how very much too good his wife was for him, was, I felt, but poor compensation.

I had never cared for the man.

In the first place he was quite twenty years older than Lucy, who was only three-and-twenty at the time of her marriage. Then he had a habit of agreeing with whatever one said, which I found singularly exasperating. He did not look at you when he spoke, either, which gives to old-fashioned people an uncomfortable impression of dishonesty; and often when he thought I was reading or engaged, I would find his little restless eye wandering round my rooms, inventorying my possessions, while he appeared, by the motion of his stumpy fingers, to be greedily calculating the indications of my prosperity.

Of course all these ideas of mine might have been only the outcome of a prejudiced imagination. But then, why should I have been prejudiced? And besides, several times he let fall hints which showed me that he thought Lucy was my heiress. Here he made a mistake, though I did not choose to undeceive him. For I have always intended Tom, my only brother's only child, to be my sole heir. He

has nothing but his wits to depend on, poor lad; for I am sorry to say that my brother was a spendthrift. Tom has done well, I know. But then, like the Providence of the proverb, I like to help people who help themselves. Now Lucy had four hundred pounds a-year of her own, besides her father's family jewels, in themselves a most valuable inheritance.

But I fear I have made a digression, and I had better hastily take up again the thread of my narrative, and stick to the facts that are to be my future benefactors.

Well, after a little time, the tone of Lucy's letters had changed. I noticed it at once, though at first there was nothing definite. For a year the child kept her counsel, though gradually the mention of her husband's name disappeared from her pages.

At last came the epistle which I had long been expecting. It was lengthy and frantic, and in it she poured out to me the pent-up stream of her woes. It seemed that she had not been married many months when she discovered that her husband was literally overwhelmed with debts. Some of these debts were old, some were new, and the worst of it was that they were constantly increasing. Tracey was hopelessly extravagant; or, more properly speaking, uncontrolled. He bought whatever took his fancy, without at all considering that the article in question had a price which sooner or later must be paid. He was continually giving Lucy costly presents, which, although she at first found flattering, she soon grew to hate in the anticipation of the unfailing bills to follow. On himself he squandered money still more lavishly, and on whatever might happen to be his fancy at the moment.

For some time things had been growing worse and worse. First Lucy's income, and then by degrees whatever part of her modest capital he could lay hands on were encroached upon for the all-devouring debts; and at last almost the only thing left to the poor child were the handsome family jewels, which, fortunately for herself, she had no power to dispose of. For, in case of her dying without issue, as now seemed likely to be the case, her father had decreed in his will that the jewels, which he had himself inherited from an uncle, were to revert to his nephew, Lucy's cousin, or the nearest male relative she had beside Tom.

It was the knowledge of the legal security of these jewels that somewhat quieted me when I had recovered the first shock of Lucy's letter on that bright winter morning. Perhaps it will be best for my readers if I copy the letter in full, for Lucy was always an elegant correspondent, and had received a good education. If her style seems a little disturbed in parts, it will be remembered that she wrote under the stress of very lively feelings and with no forewarning of future publicity. Her letter runs as follows:

"My dearest and kindest Aunt,—Your last letter was most heartily welcome and a great consolation to me, and I particularly

thank you for *the enclosure*, which I took care that Loftus should not see. My dearest Aunt, I am in the *greatest distress* of mind, and I do not know what I can possibly do unless you can make up your mind to leave your dear home for a little, and come and give me the support, as well as comfort of your presence. My dear husband *means* so very well (his last sermon was most beautiful. I wish you could have heard it!) but affairs seem in a *quite hopeless* condition. I never had any head for accounts, as you know, and Loftus says it is no good my trying to understand things. But what I *do* understand is that I have not been able to pay a single housekeeping bill for *more than ten months*, and Loftus says it is impossible for him to draw any money from the bank, because there is none there, and the letters he gets every day are *dreadful*. How people can so insult a clergyman, I cannot think. But L. says that something must be done, and as there is none of my money left that he can get at, he has a new plan—and *it is about this that I am now writing to you.*

"He wants me to part with some of the jewels, and he declares there can be no possible harm in it. I would willingly do it *if I thought I might*, and if I had not so often heard dear papa talk about their belonging to the family. I am afraid he would be vexed. Loftus says that this is all nonsense, and that he would only wish me to be happy; and he says that as I don't remember anything *clearly* about Bertie's having them afterwards, there could be no harm in my giving him just *some*, and *Bertie should have the rest.* It really does not seem wrong, since we are in such distress—but I do not like to do it without consulting you. L. strictly forbade me to do this, and as I promised, you had better not refer to my letter in your answer. Only, dearest Auntie, cannot you, and will not you propose yourself for a little visit, and that would set things quite right, for then we would bring the matter up *as though unintentionally*, and so discuss it, and you would say what dear papa's wishes really were, and if I am right in thinking that there was something about it in his will. I shall so like, too, to show you my pretty home and all my things. I shall anxiously await your reply, and remain always,

Your most affectionate niece,

LUCY TRACEY."

"Dear papa's wishes!" Dear papa's *will* would be more to the point in dealing with Loftus Tracey, I knew; and about the will I was very clear.

I felt extremely disinclined to leave my snug home in midwinter for the probable discomforts of Lucy's Yorkshire Parsonage. Moreover the weather was exceptionally cold, even for the time of year; and I am by no means a good traveller. Nevertheless, it was so clearly my duty to pay my niece the visit, and to offer her that counsel and support which she so earnestly solicited, that I did not hesitate long.

That very day I wrote her the desired letter, and in less than a week I found myself at my journey's end.

I was half dead with fatigue and cold, having travelled for ten-and-a-half hours in railway carriages which had none of the comforts and luxuries of the old stage coach. Tracey met me at the station, and accompanied me in a very cosy brougham, which appeared to be his own property, on the five-miles' drive to his Parsonage. My niece met me at the front door with every effusion of affection and welcome; and, seated by a blazing fire in their very tasteful drawing-room, with Lucy chafing my hands, while her husband supplied me with most fragrant tea, I was almost tempted to forget that my visit was not one of pleasure, but a mission to the sinner whom I was, if possible, to stop in his dishonest course.

Several times during that first evening I had to remind myself of this fact. It seemed so hard to connect anything wrong with the nicely-ordered little household. I was glad to find that Lucy had profited by the care I had spent on her during the years she had lived with me. There was absolutely no fault to be found with her dinner; and her tidy maid-servants seemed to vie with their master and mistress in attention and care. I slept well behind fresh dimity curtains, on the softest bed, with the purest linen, in the prettiest little guest-chamber imaginable, and waked the next morning to find Lucy standing over me smiling, with a dainty breakfast on a tray in her hands.

During my solitary meal I took myself seriously to task for this pleasant but very wrong state of mind; and when Lucy came up again afterwards, to sit with me while I lay and rested, I cut her short in her description of a new cow, and came straight to the point without further parley.

"How can you possibly afford to buy a new cow, Lucy," I said sternly, "when you tell me in your letters that you are already so shockingly in debt?"

She instantly burst into tears, and hid her face in the lavender-scented bed-clothes.

"Oh! don't talk of it, dear Auntie!" she sobbed. "It is too terrible to be talked of."

"But that is nonsense, Lucy," I replied with great resolution, "for I have come to talk about that and about nothing else."

She cried a great deal, but, as I was quite determined to find out the exact state of affairs, it was not long before I had drawn from her as much as she knew. It was as her letters had led me to expect. Loftus Tracey had squandered, in that aimless selfishness—which, in my opinion, is as much a viciousness as vice—whatever money he could lay hands on, and was now trying to persuade the poor thing to part with the family jewels, which the scruples of her conscience alone had so far preserved. Already, however, he had managed to undermine these, and I could see that it was with genuine disappoint-

ment that she learned how completely her father had left it out of her power to dispose of the jewels.

"What shall we do now? What shall we do?" she moaned rocking herself backwards and forwards with her face in her hands.

I reproved her, perhaps rather severely, for such childishness, and rapidly sketched out the plan of a more economical style of living, and retrenchments which would soon put them in a different position.

Lucy left off rocking and took away her hands from her face, and I noticed then that the three years of married life had made more difference in her than I had at first observed, and that she looked worn and lined about the eyes.

"It would never do," she said in a melancholy and hopeless voice. "Loftus has been used to his comforts, and he must have them. If he did not he would blame me, and it is no good for me to lose his love besides."

"His love!" Poor child! The good dinner and the comfortable arm-chair are then the substance, as well as the sum, of married love! It is as I had surmised.

It was no good saying more just then; so I dismissed Lucy, and once more alone planned with great care the course of conduct I was to pursue. To this plan, however, I found it extremely difficult to keep. It is hard for a visitor to maintain a rigid and dignified distance when a host lays himself out to be agreeable. And this is precisely what Loftus Tracey did. It pleases me now to remember that I never so far deceived myself as to be led away into supposing even for one moment that his behaviour was prompted by anything but self-interest.

It was not long before I was able to introduce deftly and without much subterfuge the subject of Loftus Tracey's debts.

We were sitting together round the fire one cold evening, and the conversation turned so naturally on the great point that I afterwards realised that my diplomacy must have been backed by Tracey's connivance. Doubtless he wished to ascertain whether I was good for any assistance or not. But I soon enlightened him by tactful reference to my narrow means. It was evident that he knew that I was acquainted with his misfortunes, although he was ignorant of the extent to which Lucy had informed me. The poor child got very nervous as I spoke of the matter, and fairly gave a little scream when I delivered myself of the following speech with bedroom-practised precision.

"The simplest plan out of all your troubles would seem to be if you could sell some of Lucy's jewels, Loftus," I said, quite naturally. "They would realise an immense sum, and would amply satisfy your creditors, I should think, and then you could start again fair. It is a pity that her father has made it so absolutely out of her power for her to part with them; for, as of course you know, they are only hers

for her lifetime. Should she die without heirs they revert to Bertie Manners."

I went calmly on with my knitting, only shooting one glance over my spectacles at my victim; which, however, caught the darkly malignant look that had spread over his countenance. He looked at his wife, whose agitation I was glad to think was quite accounted for by the previous conversations that they had themselves already held on the subject. He looked at me, but with cheerful innocence I was counting the stitches in the heel of her stocking. Finally he spoke.

"Oh, nonsense!" he said, in a strained voice. "It has not come to that! Lucy must have grossly exaggerated the state of affairs to you. And besides, in any case, I would not have had her part with the jewels. They are almost family heirlooms. Next quarter will set me all right with my creditors." And he rapidly changed the conversation.

Lucy seemed to be entirely reassured by these statements, and became quite lively. That night as she followed me to my room, she apologised very humbly for having given me the unpleasant task of interference, which had, after all, proved to be unnecessary. At the same time she could not help congratulating me on my tenacity, of which I myself, though I hushed her down, was not a little proud. She said that Loftus was of course right, and that her foolish fears had, no doubt, led her to take a distorted view of things. I kissed her, and said I devoutly hoped so—for I did not like to take from her a confidence which I myself was very far from sharing.

My mission being over, my visit would now have naturally come to an end, had I not been so unfortunate as to contract a severe influenza, which confined me to my room for more than a week.

Although this visitation spared me the obligation of sitting under the Rev. Loftus—whom I now more and more looked upon as an unmitigated humbug—on the Sunday, my natural anxiety to return to my dear home, and my usual routine of duties, no doubt increased my feverish symptoms and retarded my recovery. Add to this that the weather became daily more inclement, and that the snow lay thickly on the surrounding stretches of Parsonage glebe-land, obliterating all landmarks, and impeding any attempt at traffic.

When I was once more able to take my place at the breakfast-table, I noticed a considerable increase in the quantity of Mr. Tracey's correspondence. His plate would be daily literally heaped with commercial-sized envelopes, many of that ominous bluish tint which I have always connected with the law. At times he would affect an utter indifference as to these letters, and would sweep the whole pile carelessly into a waste-paper basket, without so much as opening one of them. But at other times, when his mood was not so cheerful, his brow would darken, and he would mutter between his teeth as he tore open envelope after envelope.

Though he continued to smile and make himself very agreeable to me, he was evidently embarrassed by my prolonged presence, was

most solicitous for my recovery, and would make as light as possible of the blocks on the line from the heavy snowfalls and the other impediments to travelling. Often I would find him striding up and down some room, his hands clutching a closely-filled page behind his back, his whole air that of a man distracted. He spent days alone in his study; not, as Lucy assured me, writing sermons, for the heavy post-bag in the evening bore witness to the way in which he must have employed his hours. What means he used and what devices he invented for staving off the coming calamity I was quite unable to conceive; as also what possible interest he could serve by so doing, seeing that the crash must finally come, and that soon.

One night, about three weeks after my first arrival, we dispersed as usual at about ten o'clock, leaving the Rev. Loftus, as was customary, to toast his toes by the drawing-room fire, with a tumbler of stiff whisky-and-water at his elbow, and the newspaper, which in that distant country only reached us just before nightfall, for company.

About a couple of hours afterwards I was awakened from my first sleep by hearing a faint crash; and, being of a slightly nervous temperament, I instantly rose, and opened my door to learn what had happened. It felt cold and was quite dark outside, but in a few moments I heard Tracey's step on the stairs. I called anxiously to know what was the matter, but was instantly reassured by Tracey, who informed me in a vexed tone that it was only he coming up to bed. I persisted in knowing what the crash had been which I had heard, and he then told me that he had been so clumsy as to break his tumbler; and, apologising for having disturbed me, he disappeared hastily into his dressing-room.

Quite contented with his explanation I retired once more, and slept soundly till the next morning.

I awoke to find everything in commotion.

Lucy flew into my room at about six o'clock, her long hair streaming down her back, her dressing-gown loosely cast round her shoulders, a candle in her hand.

"Wake up quickly, Aunt," she cried. "We have been robbed! It is a mercy that we have not all been murdered! Thieves have broken into the house, and all my jewels are gone!"

I was so flurried by her excitement and the inconsiderateness with which she had waked me, that it was a long time before I could take in the meaning of her words. When at last I had rightly apprehended their full sense, I sprang from my bed, and began hurriedly to dress myself.

"This is terrible!" I cried. "They must be immediately pursued! What is Loftus doing, and where are the police?"

"Loftus is doing all he can," Lucy replied; "but it is still quite dark out of doors and snowing hard, and the nearest policeman lives five miles off." Then, standing before my mirror, twisting up the tails of her dark hair, she proceeded to tell me all that had occurred.

She had been aroused that morning at about three o'clock by a noise, as she had thought, of footsteps. Calling to her husband, she found that he was already up and creeping about the room. She told him her alarm, when he assured her that the same idea had awakened him, but that he had made a careful search and could discover nothing amiss. Thus reassuring her, he recommended her to slumber once more, and she speedily followed his advice.

A few hours later, however, he awakened her in the greatest consternation. The dressing-room door stood wide open, as did also the lid of the small safe in it, where the family-jewels were accustomed to be kept. Together they made a rapid search and discovered that the trays and drawers of the safe had been completely rifled, except for a couple of worthless ornaments : an old-fashioned chain which had belonged to Lucy's dead mother, and an agate bracelet, in which were woven portions of the hair of a little brother and sister who had died young.

Nothing else in the room or in the house had apparently been touched. The thieves had been perfectly orderly, and had exhibited an extraordinary moderation in their depredations. Their entrance had evidently been made through the pantry window, a couple of panes of which were found removed and broken. But they had left quite unharmed the plate-chest, which was always left—as I ventured to think, with most culpable carelessness—in that room, and the key of which was in the possession of the parlour-maid. Lucy had inherited some very antique and curious silver from her father, and it was surprising that the burglars should have left such valuable booty untouched. The lock certainly appeared to have been slightly tampered with, but had evidently offered some resistance and had been abandoned. Probably, as the Rev. Loftus suggested, the thieves did not suppose that a country parson possessed anything worth "lifting" in the shape of silver, though the fame of the family jewels might have spread.

After a hasty toilette we descended to the breakfast-room, where breakfast was already laid. Here we encountered Tracey, who seemed to be the only member of the household who had retained his presence of mind. He was quietly warming his hands, one of which was bound up, being rather badly cut, he said, from his misadventure with the tumbler the night before. He greeted us with a cheerful face and a joke.

"At least," he said, "there will be no further question of parting with the jewels."

"My dearest Loftus," cried his wife, running up to him, quite deaf to his wit, and nearly upsetting the cook who was wandering aimlessly round the room with cap awry and a large frying-pan in her hands : "My dearest Loftus ! have you despatched James on Polly for the police ? and have you found any traces of these miserable wretches ?"

Before answering, her husband relieved the cook of the frying-pan

(the woman instantly burst into hysterics and ran out of the room), and himself dished with a delicate hand the frizzling bacon which it contained. He then dismissed two other startled-looking domestics—who stood with their backs to us gazing out of the window at the slowly-advancing day and murmuring incoherently to each other—and finally spoke with aggravating composure.

"My dear wife," he said, "for pity's sake let James milk the cows and feed the fowls before you send him five miles through snow-drifts from which he may never return."

"But the thieves!" cried Lucy desperately. "In the meantime they will escape, and I shall never see dear papa's trust again!"

"Surely, Lucy," Loftus replied in a tone of dignified reproof, "for the sake of recovering a few paltry jewels, and bringing some rogues to justice, you would not risk an honest man's life, and make his wife a widow, and his innocent children fatherless."

Lucy, fairly overwhelmed by this reproach, retired without further remonstrance behind the tea-pot, and Loftus Tracey began to supply himself with eatables while he related to us his version of how the robbery had taken place.

"The fact of the matter is," he said, "that I fell asleep over the paper last night, and woke after what must have been a profound slumber with a start that broke the tumbler and alarmed Aunt Susan. I was so afraid of further disturbing the household that, never dreaming of danger, I crept up to bed immediately, without, as is my usual custom, locking the doors that open on the hall. At about three o'clock this morning I was aroused by what I fancied to be footsteps, but I got up and searched, and, finding everything as usual, went quietly back to bed again. I have no doubt now that the footsteps were not fancied, but real, and it must have been then that the thieves made their entrance into the house."

"And marks?" Lucy inquired breathlessly when this narrative was finished. "Have you found no trace of footmarks this morning?"

Tracey smiled upon her compassionately, as with a single blow he decapitated his egg (an accomplishment of which, by the bye, he was very proud).

"My dear child," he said, "it has been snowing hard the whole night. If a regiment of soldiers had passed this way an hour ago there would be no trace of them left by now."

Lucy began to sob.

"It all seems so hopeless," she wept.

Her husband was preparing to reprove her, when the post-bag offered a welcome interruption.

Tracey seized it eagerly and tore open a letter.

He read it rapidly and restored it to its envelope, but not before my eye had caught that the communication was of the nature of a long bill.

"This is most unfortunate!" he exclaimed, leaning across the table to address Lucy with a slightly flushed face. "It is absolutely necessary that I should go up to London at once."

"Loftus! What do you mean? You can't go!" gasped Lucy. "The thieves! The weather!"

"Compose yourself, my dear Lucy," replied her husband, with authority; "and listen to what I have to say. I tell you I have received a letter which requires my immediate presence in London. It is on a matter of business which you cannot understand, but which is none the less of the most vital importance. I am quite as sorry as you are; but it cannot be helped, and I will set things in a proper train before I start."

"Oh, Loftus. You can't go!" mourned Lucy, helplessly. "Do think of the drifts! You will never get alive to the station."

"Pooh, pooh! They're not so bad as all that," laughed her husband, apparently oblivious of the end which he had himself but a short time ago prophesied for James. "I will put on my mackintosh leggings and Polly will soon take me in. James must borrow the butcher's mare and ride over to Fenney Cross for the police without further delay."

He rose to make the necessary arrangements, and, after briefly consulting a time-table, announced that the express left the junction two hours hence, and he had no time to lose. He went once more carefully over the details of the robbery as he had before told them to us, impressing them separately on our minds, so that we might, as he said, be able to supply the police with every facility for finding the rogues and bringing them to justice. He sent James to borrow the mare, and did not himself mount Polly until he had seen that faithful retainer plunge into the newly-fallen and still falling snow. His own luggage consisted of nothing but a small Gladstone bag, which he strapped round his shoulders. He kissed his weeping wife, assured her that he would, if possible, return the next day, waved a farewell to me, and was soon nothing but a slowly-moving speck on the dazzling landscape.

It took me some time to comfort Lucy. She said that she was afraid that Loftus was vexed with her, for he would not let her help to pack his bag. She whimpered over this, and then over her lost jewels, and then over the perilous journey which her husband had undertaken.

It was a relief to me when at length a small band of the country police arrived, accompanied by a neighbouring Squire, a magistrate, whom James had summoned. We had to bestir ourselves to provide the chilled men with suitable drinks, and to explain to them the story of the robbery. They went carefully over the whole ground, from the broken pantry window to the empty safe in the dressing-room; searched the house, and waded round the garden. Then they looked at each other, and then at us.

"It is evident that this has been a most daring and complete robbery," said the Squire at length, with all the authority of the bench in the eye that he fixed upon his subordinates.

"It is, sir," they replied in chorus; while the constable added: "They must 'ave been and got in through that there pantry-window."

After this they were served with more drinks; after which inspiration the Squire despatched the constable to telegraph down the line to stop any suspicious-looking persons; and detaining one policeman as body-guard for us, dispersed the rest about their business, and himself remained to luncheon.

His cheerful society improved our spirits, and in the enjoyment of local gossip, Lucy, for the time, forgot her calamities.

It was, I thought, but part of Tracey's usual extravagance when a messenger on horseback came over from the station that afternoon with a telegram announcing his safe arrival in London. I had never for an instant doubted the fact, but Lucy wept tears of joy over her husband's thoughtfulness, and declared that her anxiety was at last relieved, though I really think she had been far too much absorbed in the magistrate's choice scandal to experience much uneasiness.

The next day the spell of cold weather broke up and a rapid thaw set in. The whole country was flooded for miles round, but this did not prevent Loftus Tracey from returning to his home only three days later than he had promised. He had managed to despatch his business in the midst of dense fog and Arctic cold, he said, with scarcely a living creature but himself moving about the great metropolis. He insisted on my remaining some days longer, in the hope that now he himself had returned, to superintend in person the efforts that were being made to trace the thieves, some definite results might be arrived at. But all the endeavours of the local authorities proved fruitless. It was surmised that the thieves, profiting by the snow and the darkness, had instantly made off to some neighbouring seaport and had at once shipped with their booty. Advertisements, offering rewards for information, were placed in several of the local papers, but no fresh facts were forthcoming. We had indeed one or two would-be-informers; but Tracey triumphantly proved their fraudulence, and the robbery remained the mystery and astonishment of the neighbourhood.

Shortly afterwards I returned to my own home, and in the coming midsummer vacation my nephew Tom came as usual to visit me. To him I told in detail the history of the robbery of my niece's jewels, very much as I have here stated it. He listened to it with evidently deepening interest. When I had finished and asked him for his opinion on the subject, he answered by beginning to cross-examine me with a briskness for which I was not prepared.

"Did you notice anything peculiar in Mr. Tracey's correspondence after this robbery?" he inquired.

"Well, no," I replied. "For the last few days of my visit the post-bag very rarely brought anything at all. And for my part I was extremely glad of it, for Tracey was always in so much better humour with Lucy when not dunned by those odious bills."

"And the jewels," he continued in a business-like tone. "Of what did they consist, and what do you suppose was their worth?"

"I am not quite sure," I replied; for I disliked being made to commit myself in a hurry. "But I believe they were mostly diamonds, some of very great value. I only saw them once, and that was during my sister's lifetime; but I remember a very beautiful necklace composed of three rows of diamonds, and there was a collection of unset emeralds as well of even greater value. I have heard your aunt say that they alone were a fortune in themselves."

"And do I understand you that the lock of the safe was found forced, Aunt?" pursued Tom.

"I never said anything of the kind," I replied, "and I object to have statements which I did not make put into my mouth. I do not remember there being any question of the lock of the safe. But now I think of it, I don't see how it can have been forced, for then it would have been broken. And I remember quite clearly that when Colonel Brace brushed against the lid by mistake, it shut of itself with a spring, and Lucy had to open it again with her keys."

"And where did she keep her keys?" interrogated my persistent nephew.

"In her dress-pocket, to be sure," I replied testily. "Where else should she keep them?"

"And the parlour-maid having the key, the plate-chest in the pantry remained untouched, although it was the very first object which the robbers would have encountered on their entry through the window, as I understand it?" suggested Tom.

"Yes," I replied. "It seemed to have been attempted, but the lock was a very strong and peculiar one, and the thieves cannot have had any instruments to suit it, Tracey thought; and I know Colonel Brace agreed with him in this opinion."

"A most impudent and clumsy fraud," cried out Tom, after a moment's pause. "A most impudent and clumsy fraud!"

"What do you mean?" I inquired in utter amazement.

"My dear Aunt," he burst out with a roar of laughter, "the whole thing is as plain as a pike-staff. The robber that you were all looking for was none other than the Rev. Loftus Tracey himself."

"Tom!" I cried.

For the first time in my life I was near hysterics.

Tom took both my hands and held them in his own; with him a specific against temporary affections of the nerves (at least so he explained the attitude to me when I found him in it the other day with my pet aversion, Ruth Law).

"Don't you see it, Aunt Susan?" he said, speaking very rapidly

in his excitement. "Why, I think the whole country must have been daft not to have seen it! The poor scoundrel was so hard up for money that he did not know which way to turn. So he gets up one night, takes his wife's keys from her pocket quite quietly, unlocks the safe, and packs a Gladstone bag full with her jewels. And the next morning he goes off to London, or elsewhere, and disposes of them, leaving you to proceed against imaginary delinquents. Then he pays his creditors and rests from his duns. He is so awkward that he cannot pick a lock or open a safe without the key; and when he tries to divert suspicion by taking out a pane from the pantry-window, he can't do it without cutting himself. And yet he takes you all completely in! But do you see now, you dear old simpleton?" he cried, looking with his laughing eyes into mine.

"I see, I see," was all that I could gasp.

"And now," Tom pursued, "you tell me that they have sailed for Australia. The Rev. Loftus's health requires it. Better still! Though his attempt has been crowned with splendid success, it is safer not to tempt fortune too far, and any day the whole thing might have been discovered. As it is, I cannot think what the police and magistracy were dreaming of. But I suppose he had his reputation as a clergyman and a gentleman to go upon."

I feebly assented.

"And Bertie Manners, the cousin?" inquired Tom. "Has he taken no steps?"

"Bertie Manners is away, making a three years' tour of the world," I replied. "By the last accounts, he is dying of fever in the West Indies. I am quite sure that his poor mother is quite incapable of taking any steps of any kind."

"Take it apart from the extraordinary connivance of circumstances, and I reiterate that it was nothing but a most impudent and clumsy fraud," repeated Tom.

ALFRED CASBY.

ONE thing particularly struck me during my career at Oxford University; and that was that at least one half of the "fast set" of men, if not a greater proportion, consisted of youths, whose resources certainly did not warrant their living at the expensive rate they assumed.

For instance. Sons of the clergy, dressed in the most fashionable manner, were frequently to be seen driving neat little traps to Abingdon, Whitney, Woodstock, or some other of the favourite retreats which abound so plentifully near Oxford; yet all the while these youths knew that their fathers were denying themselves, to procure for their boys a University education. Sons of widowed mothers, the latter of whom, by curtailing the household expenses, could just afford to give their darlings the benefit of taking a degree, and whose darlings were giving sumptuous dinners, and otherwise entertaining their friends in a manner quite regardless of expense; and young men of this class, ad infinitum, went, as is stated above, far towards making up that curse of the University, "the fast set."

It may reasonably be asked, What is the cause of this state of things? Is it that the young generation of to-day is utterly reckless and careless? This may be a partial cause for this state of affairs.

But we must here, as an excuse, inquire how many young men of an age ranging from nineteen to twenty years could be found who, coming straight from the restrictions of school, into the entire freedom of University life, would not in a greater or lesser degree be tempted to fall into many unnecessary and often most reprehensible extravagances?

Here let us give one more excuse for the reckless undergraduate who is by degrees being whirled round, as it were, in a whirlpool of fashion, pleasure and ruin. This excuse is the Oxford tradesman. It is high time, it has long been high time, for the authorities to take the matter in hand and to alter the state of affairs materially.

The Oxford tradesmen generally give three years' credit, and I have known them even refuse ready money. The reason is obvious; viz., the enormous interest charged on the goods supplied, which in the first instance are of the highest price and, in most cases, of the lowest quality. I have met with honest tradesmen in Oxford; it is only fair to state this; but as a rule they insinuate, nay, even force themselves upon men to such an extent, that they are really very much more to blame than the undergraduates themselves.

There is yet another excuse for young men who get into difficul-

ties, and live extravagantly; and that, to coin a word, is the stand-off-ishness of the dons.

A youth at school is restricted by being told what to do. He is accustomed to look up to his house-master or even his form-master with respect, often mingled with affection. Then comes the change. He matriculates at the University. At first the old school influence predominates; but by degrees, and imperceptibly, this influence wears away. He has no one to confide in. He recognises the dons as a distinct race of men from the rest of humanity, with a manner freezing and stiff, that would repel any attempt at confidence, if one felt inclined to make overtures of friendship. I am speaking of the generality of the Oxford dons. Some are no doubt disposed to be friendly and kind; but there is that wretched dislike to anything new prevailing in Oxford, and it is this "keeping up the good old customs" that still maintains the old régime of affairs. Consequently between the authorities and undergraduates there is an insurpassable gulf, only to be crossed when changes have made the University what it should be.

The last reason or excuse I shall mention is, that men who have no acquaintance in the University, when they first "go up," are naturally anxious to get into a "good set." This is next door to impossible unless you have money, or live as though you had it. By the "best set" I do not mean the young nobility, or indeed any titled men, who, I am sorry to say, are very often far removed from being the best set; but I mean the set of honest, well-meaning English gentlemen, well-bred and very polite in manner. Yet they do not become intimate with you unless, as I said before, you either have a respectable income or live as though you had it. Thus the son of your tailor, familiarly termed "Snips," may be in the best set, and you, who patronise Snips' father, will be known only as "that smug Brown:" smug to the Oxford men being what a fool is to the world in general.

Having thus moralised for a short time on the evils and defects of the University and University life: although volumes might be written on knotty points, and discussions innumerable raised on debatable subjects: I will at once commence the short narrative it is intended to offer to the reader's critical, but let us hope, lenient eye.

The hero of our tale was not a noble, stalwart fellow of the "Tom Brown" type. He was a very small, shabbily-dressed man, with worn features, and a mournful expression on his face, which told of want and poverty. The first time I ever saw Casby was one day when, walking up the High Street to my college, with two or three other men, one of them pointed him out to me, saying as he did so: "That's one of our freshmen, Casby by name. Lively looking bird, isn't he?"

Whether it was something in the "lively bird's" worn out clothes and dejected appearance that inspired me with pity and curiosity, I

cannot say; but I was strangely attracted towards the certainly unattractive object of our attention, and told Blyth, who had made the remark, that I should like to meet Casby some day.

"My dear fellow," was the astonished rejoinder, "you don't mean to say you want to know a 'smug' like that man! Why, look at his clothes! You would be the laughing stock of the whole place if you went about with him. Besides which," he added, "the fellow has not a penny to bless himself with, and is not even respectably connected!"

Blyth's father had made a large fortune by manufacturing coffee-pots, and certainly no one could accuse him of not having a penny to bless himself with. On the contrary he had a great many pennies, but whether he was blessing himself with them or the reverse is a matter into which we will not enter.

"You're wrong this time, Pot," retorted Vere, another of the party. "I know, or rather did know, his people well. They had a place down in our part of the world, and were one of the best families in the county; but the father got mixed up in some unlucky speculations, and lost all his coin. The governor has asked me to call on Casby, and I shall certainly look him up when I find time."

Blyth, who always disliked any reference to his father's business, and the nickname of Pot being extremely distasteful to him, shortly afterwards left us. As I walked to Vere's rooms, I questioned him more particularly concerning Casby's affairs; consequently I willingly accepted the invitation to call that evening with him, when Vere laughingly suggested that we should do so.

About nine o'clock we knocked at Casby's door, and entered the room.

The room was plainly, but comfortably furnished; and, having ensconced myself in an easy chair, I prepared to make conversation, and if possible enliven the melancholy and seedy-looking tenant to the best of my ability.

Judge then of my astonishment when Casby began with an easy yet courteous manner to talk fluently about every topic of interest. After the first few minutes it was easily perceptible that Casby was an uncommonly good talker, and moreover a very well informed man. Politics, the theatre, race meetings, and various other subjects of interest were discussed, and on each Casby displayed an amount of knowledge which was really astounding. I think Vere was equally surprised, for as we left the rooms he said to me, "Mark my words: that fellow will either turn out a great man or a swindler."

These words seemed rather vague and incongruous, but time showed that Vere was perfectly right; in which way we shall see later on.

The next term Casby seemed suddenly to have changed. The haggard, worn look was no longer there. No one dressed better or looked a more thorough gentleman than Casby. Everyone who

knew him was charmed with his company. His powers of oratory rendered him an acquisition at the Union Debating Society. He was known by name to the whole University, and had, by mere talent, firmly won a position in the "best set."

Now at the commencement of our tale we stated that it was impossible to do this without money, and Casby, as we know, had not a superfluous amount of this necessary evil. Yet Casby was living as though he had a large income. His wine and cigars were noted for their excellence; his dinners were the subject of much conversation among the men; and Casby's opinion about the winner of the next Derby or Oaks was a thing worth knowing.

Strange to say, the man who was Casby's most intimate friend and confidant at this period was Blyth, who informed his friends that Casby was an awfully good sort of fellow, you know; a thorough man of the world and of a good old family.

During Casby's third term at Oxford, Vere and I did not see much of him. Hard at work for our final examination, we were engaged in reading most of the day, and scarcely found time for any relaxation from our work. Consequently, we were considerably astonished to find, one evening, the whole hall in which we met for dinner ringing with Casby's name, and on further inquiry learnt that Casby and Blyth were no longer members of the University. The story was, that after having borrowed money until he could borrow no more, and the tradesmen were beginning to get anxious about the large sums which were owed them, Casby had forged the name of one of his uncles, thereby procuring several thousand pounds; and was now, no one, except Blyth, who was with him, knew where.

Hoping that we should find the story false, immediately after dinner Vere and I wended our way to Casby's college to find out the true state of things. First of all we inquired of the porter, who was reticent and seemed to wish to avoid the subject as much as possible.

While, however, we were endeavouring to question him, a cab drove up, and a widow lady alighted.

The features left no doubt as to who it was: the striking resemblance to Casby at once told us that it was his mother. The weary look that I had seen on Casby's face the first time I saw him was there; the same eyes; and the well-worn mourning dress told us the old, old story of a mother's denial for her son, and the son's requital for the denial.

It was some time before Mrs. Casby could speak for sobbing, and when she could utter a few words they seemed to die away as the facts of the case came more plainly before her.

Though Vere and I offered every assistance in our power, and as much consolation as was possible, yet we were so deeply moved by the piteous sight of the poor old white-headed lady that we were very nearly breaking down ourselves.

Mrs. Casby expressed her intention of returning the same evening,

notwithstanding all Vere and I could do in trying to persuade her to stay in Oxford one night, if only for the sake of rest. But it was useless. Mrs. Casby had a short interview with the Dean, and left that night, taking with her most of her son's belongings. Before she left, on bidding us farewell, the poor lady burst into tears and forced upon Vere a handsome silver flask, while I was the recipient of a handsome riding whip. "To remember my poor boy by," as the widow said.

Neither Vere nor I felt fit for work that night. We smoked and talked with a sorrowful thought of the old lady, whose trials were so many and bitter.

Two days afterwards, a note came from Casby's old college, which upon opening I found to be from the Dean, requesting Vere and myself to call upon him at one o'clock that morning.

There is always something dreadful and awe-inspiring about visiting a Dean at Oxford. Men are generally summoned to appear before the Dean when they have committed any crime, or otherwise broken the rules of the University. It may be argued that the Dean of another college has no jurisdiction over men outside his own walls. That is true, but the Dean of Casby's college was at the time Vice-Chancellor, and the Vice-Chancellor is all-powerful.

It was therefore with a considerable amount of timidity that Vere and I assumed our caps and gowns, and, turning over in our minds everything that we had done lately that was extraordinarily bad, knocked at the Dean's door.

We were ushered into the learned gentleman's study, and heard a tale that left us almost dumb with amazement.

The mother of Casby had never been to Oxford at all. The white-haired lady was none other than Casby himself, who, under pretence of coming to see about the state of things, had cleverly endeavoured to take away most of his valuable property. "And, gentlemen," said the Dean, "it will be perhaps as well if we were to keep this matter to ourselves; for the widow, after great persuasion, permitted me to lend her five pounds!"

We left the Dean, who, I think, half fancied that we were in the plot, and had asked us there to try and find out what we knew about the matter; and when we had got outside, could contain ourselves no longer. The poor Dean, deploring his £5, which, after so much pressing and hesitation, the widow had consented to take; the presents given to us in memory of the son; all combined to give the affair so ludicrous an aspect, that we burst into a prolonged and uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Just think," cried Vere, "what fools we made of ourselves!"

"Yes," added I; "we had better take the Dean's advice, and let no one know anything about it."

And I do not believe that anyone does know anything to this day, except the Dean, the porter, Jack Vere and I, about Casby's dodge, and the way we were taken in.

It was about two years after this event—during which period neither Vere nor I, nor indeed anyone that we knew of, had heard any news of Casby or Blyth—that I met Vere in Chancery Lane one afternoon, and agreed to dine with him at his club the following evening.

We had never lost sight of one another, and having contracted a firm friendship in the old days at Oxford, had, since we had taken our degrees, frequently met in town, where Vere was now residing. I, in my frequent visits to London, made a point of never leaving without either spending a day or part of a day in his company. Consequently, next evening, waiting in Vere's sitting-room until, having finished his toilette, we might adjourn to his club, I happened to take up the evening paper which was lying on the table, and, casting my eye down the leading articles, came across the following extract, which I copy from the original.

A CLEVER SWINDLE.

A fraud of the most impudent and bare-faced description has lately been perpetrated in London by two gentlemen styling themselves Messrs. Pryce and Fowler, Solicitors, but who were in reality two clever rogues, whose names were respectively Casby and Blyth.

The details are as follows.

These two gentlemen, who we understand are wanted for similar freaks of the same description, recently hired an office in the City, had it most sumptuously fitted up in the newest style, and a brass plate affixed to the door with the inscription, Messrs. Pryce, Fowler and Son, Solicitors, Land Agents, &c., and placed in numerous country local papers the following advertisement:

"Adoption, £200. This sum will be paid, together with a further annual sum of £150 to any respectable person (country farmer preferred) who will for a period of six years take sole charge of a child (girl), aged five years; parents going abroad. Expense not so much an object as comfortable home. Respectable persons must apply personally to Messrs. Pryce, Fowler and Son, Solicitors, 909, Lombard Street. References given and required."

We learn from one of the applicants that, in answer to this advertisement, she went up from near Peterborough on the Thursday morning, and found on her arrival at the office that there was little chance of an interview that day, the place being besieged by an enormous crowd, chiefly consisting of farmers' wives from the country, who were evidently bent on the same errand as herself.

After waiting for two hours, however, she was ushered into a private room, where a benevolent old gentleman, busily engaged in writing, courteously invited her to be seated, saying that he would attend to her in a few moments.

When the benevolent old gentleman did attend to her, he held out great hopes of a satisfactory result, and success to her application;

having previously questioned her rigidly as to the clergyman of the parish, etc. Our informant makes no secret of having offered the old gentleman a portion of the money, in the event of her application proving successful, but states that the old gentleman firmly yet kindly refused the offer, saying that he made a point of never conducting his business in that manner; but that all that was necessary for her to do would be to pay his head clerk the return fare to the station nearest her home, and a few other expenses incidental to the consideration of her case. This she did, and parted from Mr. Pryce, as the benevolent old gentleman styled himself, convinced that her application had been successful, and rejoicing in her apparently good luck.

Having been told that, owing to the unprecedented number of applications, there was no possibility of the clerk being able to call upon her for the next three or four days, and that this being a very busy time of the year, none of the other clerks could be spared, she waited a week, and wrote to the office, but was greatly surprised to find her letter returned with the words "Gone away" written on the envelope. She at once communicated with the police, who informed her that they had received more than a thousand inquiries on the same subject.

Another applicant states that there were several clerks in the office, and that during her interview with Mr. Pryce or Mr. Fowler, for she was uncertain which gentleman questioned her, one of the clerks came in twice; bringing with him, the first time, a number of papers to be signed, and saying, the second time, "His Grace is very sorry he cannot keep his appointment to-day, sir, but hopes to be with you to-morrow."

A more clever or more impudent swindle has scarcely ever been perpetrated, and it is roughly estimated that during the few days Messrs. Pryce and Fowler tenanted their office in Lombard Street, they benefited themselves to the extent of several thousand pounds. It speaks volumes for the credulity of people who answer advertisements at random; but it must be remembered that the advertisement was not inserted in the London papers, and country folk are always more easily imposed upon than their sharper and more sophisticated brethren in the metropolis. We regret to hear that the police have up to the present time no clue as to the whereabouts of the malefactors.

That was the last that Vere or I ever heard of Casby. Where he is at the present moment, or what doing, no one, so far as we can learn, knows. Whether we hear of him again depends a great deal upon the success of his first appearance in public.

ANTONY HERBERT.

LETTERS FROM MAJORCA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Under Northern Skies," etc., etc.

Catalina.

Palma de Mallorca, June, 1887.

My Dear E.—With the arrival of Dr. Fitzgilbert, the old order of things passed away; a new reign commenced. It was indeed time.

I have told you how I went down from Il Tereno to meet the boat. Enrico had rattled up with his karrawakky at the very moment the vessel was declared in sight. Don Negro, sensible and superior dog that he was, did not even bark at his approach, or attempt to follow him at his departure. He looked at me with his great brown eyes, and great broad head, and blinked and whined, and in every possible way gave me to understand that he knew all about it. Something grave was going on; a life seemed hovering in the balance; even the best of dogs must remain in the background.

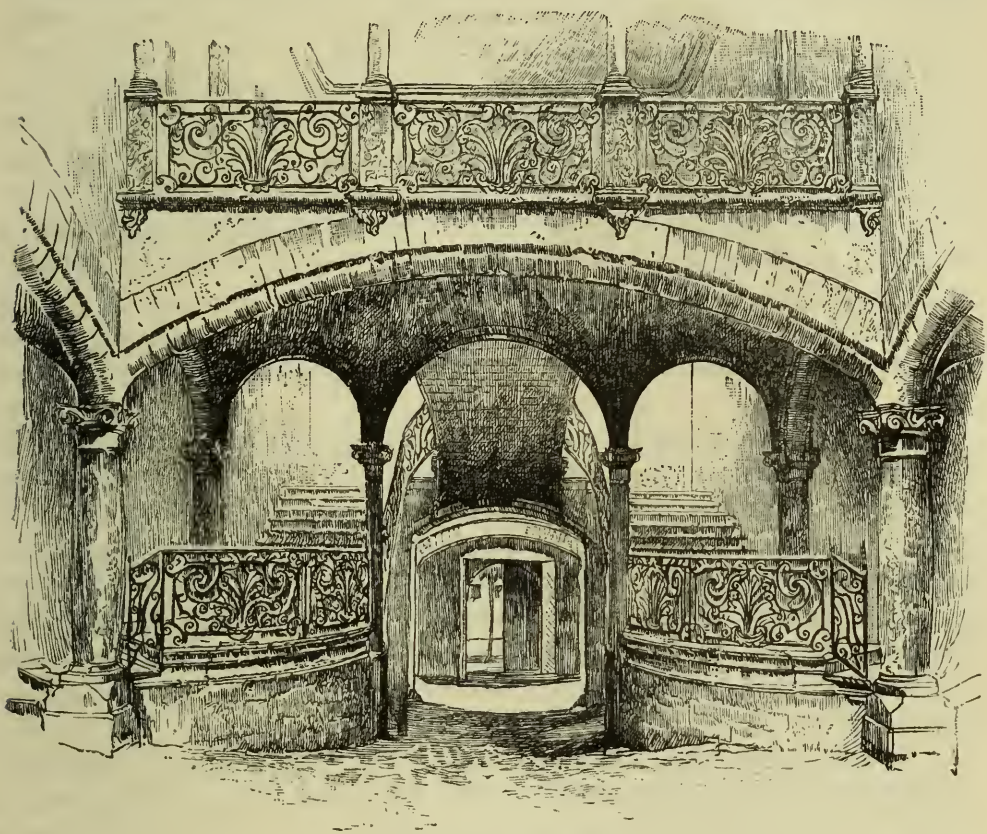
Enrico, detecting my impatience, put on steam, and we rattled down at a breakneck pace. How we escaped overturning was a miracle only to be performed by a Mallorcan or a Neapolitan driver. In Naples they drive as if pursued by the enemy; but in Mallorca I have seen them drive as if pursued by the arch-fiend. I have watched half a dozen vehicles racing one behind another with electric speed, disappearing in a cloud of dust that filled the atmosphere. The S.P.C.A. would do well to look after them.

In like manner I rattled down to the port; but the end justified the occasion. To have missed the arrival would have been a calamity without name. It was not to be thought of. But as you already know, I was in good time.

It was a beautiful and brilliant morning, about half-past four, a.m.,

when the doctor set foot in Palma. If, to mark the event, I could only have fired a rocket that should have blazed up into the heavens with a great noise, and been seen in England by those whom it concerned, how gladly would I have kindled the torch. But no doubt anxious hearts over there, even at that early hour, were keeping vigil and anticipating the event. Uneasy lies the head of care; the charged heart beats time heavily to the passing moment.

Following the doctor down the gangway came Nurse Long. They are always distinguished by the title of Nurse, you know, when once



COURT IN PALMA.

they have joined what may be called the Ministering Sisterhood. Their dress, too, seems to separate them in some degree from the rest of mankind; and Nurse Long's dress has already attracted great attention in Palma. People look upon her as a curiosity. Yet there is nothing curious about her, except that, Long by name, she is extremely short and little by nature. And even this is not really curious, for nature seems to delight in these contradictions. Thus it is upon record that the unwise parents of a promising child named her Brilliana, and as a natural consequence she grew up exceedingly hideous. Not a pretty word to apply to a lady, but truth before all things.

I was at once taken with Nurse Long's face and expression. There

was a calmness and repose about it that would have soothed the most refractory patient; and A. was anything but that. I felt certain that he would immediately transfer his allegiance from Sister Cecilia, sweet though her face, soft though her voice, romantic though her name, to Nurse Long. So it proved.

On landing, of course there was some delay about the luggage. This always happens. Something generally goes astray and has to be looked for from stem to stern. It is at last found in the most conspicuous, the most ordinary place. Whilst the doctor went back to the vessel to right whatever was wrong, I conducted Nurse Long to the carriage, politely telling her what a treasure I felt she would prove, and how terribly she was needed. She accepted my praise very becomingly; was evidently very modest. Although little, she is not self-asserting: an exception to the usual rule. It is, generally speaking, your elephants that are amiable. Your grasshoppers, on the contrary, keep you for ever on the look-out, wondering what will come next. A bee in a tar-barrel makes more commotion than an elephant would make under the most trying circumstances.

Nurse Long is self-reliant only on the field of battle; I mean, of course, in the exercise of her vocation. There, she is worth her weight in gold.

"I don't know what I should have done without Dr. Fitzgilbert," she remarked, as I placed her in the carriage. "I could never have got here without him. Had I been alone on reaching Barcelona, I should simply have sat down on my luggage on the platform, cried my eyes out, and gone back by the next train. I have never been abroad; and surrounded by that unknown tongue, in the midst of that platform crowd, I should have felt more lost than in the deserts of Arabia. Fortunately Dr. Fitzgilbert was with me, and so I was saved."

I don't know why, but I immediately thought of the Salvation Army, and asked Nurse Long if she belonged to it. Why do we sometimes ask ridiculous questions at the most inopportune times, and then insanely laugh at our own folly? But only I laughed. Nurse Long seemed inclined to resent the remark as what the French call une plaisanterie.

"The doctor certainly seems a host in himself," I said, changing the subject and looking towards the steamer, where he was just coming down the gangway for the second time, followed by eight or nine men carrying heavy packages. I wondered whether they had brought out a winter outfit to Mallorca for summer wear, and turned inquiringly to Nurse Long. I think she understood the look, but she did not enlighten my ignorance.

"More than a host," she remarked, in answer to my remark. "Much more than a host; a perfect battalion. From first to last he has been most paternal."

Considering that the doctor evidently had the advantage of Nurse

Long in point of years, I thought the expression curious. But Nurse Long is a Cornish woman, and the Cornish people, as you and I know by experience, have all their own original way of talking and thinking and acting. Their use of the personal pronoun, too, is quite their own. "She ain't a-calling o' we, us don't belong to she," as Punch once had it, is a phrase after their own heart, and according well with the rules of Cornish grammar. Of course, I refer to the humbler classes.

Nurse Long's pronouns naturally are perfect. But she is very strong upon Cornwall. If there is a paradise upon earth, that is it. She also writes regularly every day to a Cornish gentleman. I know he is Cornish, because his name begins with Tre: and "By Tre, Pol, and Pen, you may know the Cornish men." She tells me he is her brother; but as her name does not begin with Tre, I cannot quite reconcile the statement with ordinary fact. Brothers and sisters generally bear the same name. The sister of Mr. Jones, for instance, is not usually Miss Smith. But Nurse Long may have changed her name on joining the Ministering Sisterhood: or the gentleman may have changed his name on coming into a fortune upon the death of a rich aunt or a benevolent uncle. If it is not something of this sort, then is Nurse Long throwing dust in my eyes. And my suspicions once aroused, a detective would not —— However, I will let it pass.

But I am leaving our travellers all this time on the quay. This is contrary to what happened, for you may be sure that we set off the very first moment we were ready. The heavy packages were piled upon the roof of the karrawakky, which, to my surprise, did *not* break down; the inquisitive custom-house officers were at length satisfied of the general harmlessness of the luggage; and we rattled off towards the Consulate. Before us was the long, white, dusty road, bounded by the fortifications; to our left rose the cathedral, a glorious, ever-dignified pile; to our right broke the blue, shimmering waters of the wide and matchless Levant; above, the sun slowly rolled upwards in the equally blue and matchless southern sky. Especially blue and beautiful at this early morning hour. In the fuller noontide glare, the blue fades and almost gives place to an intense, brooding whiteness.

In spite of anxiety, and a certain restless impatience, I think Dr. Fitzgilbert was much struck by the incomparable beauty of the scene; the gorgeous colouring, the rainbow atmosphere, which, as I have told you, steeps my own imagination in all the dreams of Oriental glamour, all the visions of the lotus-eater. But as we journeyed, our talk was not of surrounding influences. In as few words as possible, I gave him a detailed account of all that had taken place. At much that was narrated he shook his head and looked grave; whilst Nurse Long, with Cornish energy, occasionally uttered a pious exclamation.

"We have not arrived too soon," said the doctor, when I ceased. "And evidently, nurse, your services will be needed no less than mine."

"I shall very humbly come second to you," replied Nurse Long; and I was still more favourably impressed with her; for the Cornish people, of all sects and sizes, denominations and castes, are not particularly famous for the virtue of humility. But Nurse Long's tone had the true ring in it.

"As soon as I saw you, I was sure you had come to meet us," said the doctor, suddenly turning to me. "The one Saxon face amongst all those dark Majorcans could not be mistaken. Forgive me for saying that I thought it the most anxious face I had ever seen. Then I noticed that you were in deep mourning, and ——"

He paused. It was not necessary to complete the unfinished sentence. Enough that we were thankful that he was here and still needed.

The carriage passed under the old gateway, and struggled up the short steep turning to the Consulate. It rattled over the stones with a noise of artillery, and when it stopped, a silence that might be felt ensued. We mounted the stairs, beyond the scented branches and aromatic herbs. Barbara opened to us: Barbara, sphinx-like, impenetrable, portentous. Barbara evidently does not like the idea of an English doctor coming over to interfere with her dear Mallorcan physicians. She is naturally prejudiced in their favour; and, with all her strong common sense, we cannot wonder at it. We are all more or less creatures of prejudice. Better that, perhaps, than to be swayed about with every wind that blows. So let us keep our prejudices in repair, and take care that they are of the right sort.

As I have told you, with the arrival of Doctor Fitzgilbert another reign commenced. Le roi est mort, vive le roi! Old things became new. In less than an hour, he and Nurse Long had so asserted their influence that you would never have recognised the invalid, his condition and surroundings, from what had been. The weight of an incubus fell from me. I now felt that, humanly speaking, everything might be hoped for. At any rate, everything would be done that could be done, and the issue was not in our hands. Dr. Fitzgilbert did not attempt to conceal from himself or from us that the greatest danger existed.

The Mallorcan doctors, naturally enough, did not very much like the new order of things. Le roi est mort, vive le roi, is all very well for the reigning monarch. However much they were deferred to; however delicately it was intimated that Dr. Fitzgilbert must now take chief control of the case; it was difficult to conceal a certain feeling of soreness in the matter. Perhaps we should have felt the same under similar circumstances. Dr. O., who had merely been called in in consultation, retired from the field. His duties were ended. It was arranged that Dr. N. should call in occasionally, and

that Dr. M. should continue his attendance in conjunction with Dr. Fitzgilbert.

But Dr. M. very soon declared that he could not agree with the new treatment; could not sanction it or give it the light of his countenance. Under its effects the patient must sink.

And perhaps from his own point of view he was right. The English and Mallorcan constitutions are essentially different, and what would cure in the one case might possibly kill in the other. Certainly I think that A. could never have survived the Mallorcan treatment. What the English is to do for him, still weighs in the balance; time alone can bring us the result.

NEAR PALMA.

Not Dr. M. only protested against the new departure. The very morning after Dr. Fitzgilbert's arrival, the medical Paganini entered the sick-room, playfully toying with his shears, for which he evidently possesses a tender affection; gave one look at the condition of affairs, and fled with a howl and a rapidity that might have led one to imagine he was being pursued by that evil spirit with whom the musical Paganini was said to have dealings.

He fled; and he never returned. We have not seen him again, with the exception of one morning when the doctor and I paid a visit to the chemist. As we entered by one door, he caught sight of us and fled by the other; fled, without a moment's pause, with the sentence he was uttering unfinished. Shears in hand, he disappeared rapidly down the narrow street, as silent and almost as intangible as

a shadow. Yet there was something so quaint and funny about him, that, in spite of his eccentricity: nay, perhaps for very reason of its existence: we all liked him and regretted the humour his daily visits had brought with them.

In like manner, Dr. M. retired at the end of the second day. This was good and conscientious on his part. Unable to agree with the present treatment, he felt it impossible to countenance what his judgment condemned. Under the circumstances it was better to withdraw. He did so, with a warning that whatever this system might produce in England, it must prove fatal in Mallorca.

On first arriving, Dr. Fitzgilbert had not been in the house an hour before an amusing incident took place. He was very much in want of some ice, but there was no one to ask for it. Barbara had "no English," we had no Mallorcan. Our host was resting. We might be in this condition, playing at cross questions and crooked answers for some time to come.

However, we laid siege to Barbara. The doctor, like a true Englishman, attacked her vigorously in his native tongue. She looked coldly upon him. I wish I could give you her portrait, as she stood listening to a language of which she could not understand a word. The firmly-set mouth, the drooping, disdainful eyes, yet without a suspicion of disrespect about them. Barbara is inimitable. She is that rare thing upon earth—a character. There is an old saying that one sheep is very much like another sheep, or something to that effect. So is it, I think, with mankind. You seldom come upon one who stands out with marked individuality. It is these exceptions that rule their little world: their circle, narrow or wide, as it may chance to be. These it is who become popes and heroes and models to their companions, and permanently influence them for good or ill. It is impossible to realise how much a man's character, and consequently his career through life, is determined by the great power of personal influence.

But to return to Barbara—no doubt an influence in her way, and in her day, and in her little world.

The doctor asked very emphatically and distinctly for what he wanted. After all, he could only ask for ice, but he put it in six different forms. He may have thought that the difference between English and Mallorcan was a mere matter of construction; I don't know; the mind of man is ingenious.

Barbara gazed out of her great black eyes, disapproving, perplexed and bewildered, doing her best to solve the riddle. Then she caught the word *ice*. She gave a cry, her face broadened into a half smile, and with a flash of intelligence she rapidly disappeared. Barbara understood.

Winding her quick flight down the great stone staircases, she crossed the courtyard and was lost to sight.

In about ten minutes, she returned. The doctor was in the

drawing-room, waiting, more or less impatiently, for the ice. We were conversing in low tones, when in came Barbara, both arms full, staggering under the weight of an immense bunch of leeks or onions! There was triumph in her look; there grew perplexity in ours. Had Barbara, too, gone mad? with worry, or the weight and woe of her responsibilities, or the extreme heat? It was not impossible. Many a weak brain has given way whose lines of life have been less thrown out than were Barbara's just now. But then Barbara has not a weak brain, and her jet black eyes were clear and steady. No; she was not mad.

"There's your ice," said Barbara, in Mallorcan—I could just understand her. "What are you going to do with it? How is it to be prepared?"

How indeed! For seasoning purposes, here was a six months' supply. As far as the sick room was concerned it would last a lifetime. I suggested that they should go and do duty amongst the scented branches and aromatic leaves that strewed the staircases; but Barbara's practical ideas upon thrift forbade the waste.

It soon became evident that *ice*, or rather its equivalent in sound, was Mallorcan for leek or onion, and so the mistake had arisen. But the misunderstanding was so ludicrous; it was such an absurd instance of cross question and crooked answer; Barbara looked so ridiculous as she staggered in with her savoury but most unexpected burden, and we were so amazed and confounded, that, in spite of all our trouble and anxiety, long and silent laughter was all the answer she received. Then light dawned upon her; she, too, began to understand that we had been playing at cross questions; and her face relaxed into a genuine smile as she took in the humour of the situation.

"Santa Barbara!" I cried, perhaps because it was about all I *could* say in Mallorcan. And, with a laugh and a shake of the head, and an upright carriage and a firm but beautifully soft step, she clasped her precious bundle of leeks close and fast, and retreated to her own dominions.

A soft step. Who does not appreciate it? Oh, those women who go through the world with loud tread and heavy footfall! How they lacerate one's nerves! Is it not the next worst thing to a loud voice, this masculine tread in woman, who should go softly and speak gently all the days of her life?

Barbara retired; but the matter was only delayed, not denied. Presently, the ice, hitherto proscribed, appeared; cooling to heated rooms, refreshing to parched and fevered lips. As I have told you, a new reign had commenced.

Some days have gone on since the eventful morning of the arrival. Our anxiety continues. Danger, great danger, still exists. The fluctuations in the state of the patient are remarkable. The improvement of one hour gives place to an increased temperature the next. A lucid interval is very quickly followed by delirium.

Yet one's daily life of course has to go on, as if there were no such thing as trouble and illness and anxiety to weight the passing hours. Those who are in health must endeavour to remain so. Thus, at about ten o'clock every morning, Nurse Long, who has kept vigil all night, has to go out for an hour's walk, by strict orders, before lying down.

The doctor and I generally accompany her. Nothing would persuade her to sally forth alone. She did so the second morning after her arrival, and lost herself in the perplexing streets of Palma. Imagine her position—unable to speak a word of the language, and so not daring to enter a shop or address anyone who passed her by. She arrived back again at the end of three hours in a most hysterical condition, and fainted dead away from fatigue and fright.

Therefore we now accompany her. This daily exercise is absolutely necessary under the circumstances, and in this enervating climate. The heat is intense, and is much against the patient. Day after day the sky is cloudless, growing white and heated as a furnace towards noon. The glare of the sun is so great that it is difficult to go out without the protection of large blue glasses; double glasses or pince-nez, that you perch upon the nose. The first morning that we all three wore them, Mr. Bateman met us, and graphically declared that we looked like three owls in a row, charging the world. They certainly do not add to one's beauty, but it is astonishing how quickly human nature yields to the inevitable. This power of adapting oneself to circumstances, this acceptance of what must be, is one of man's best gifts.

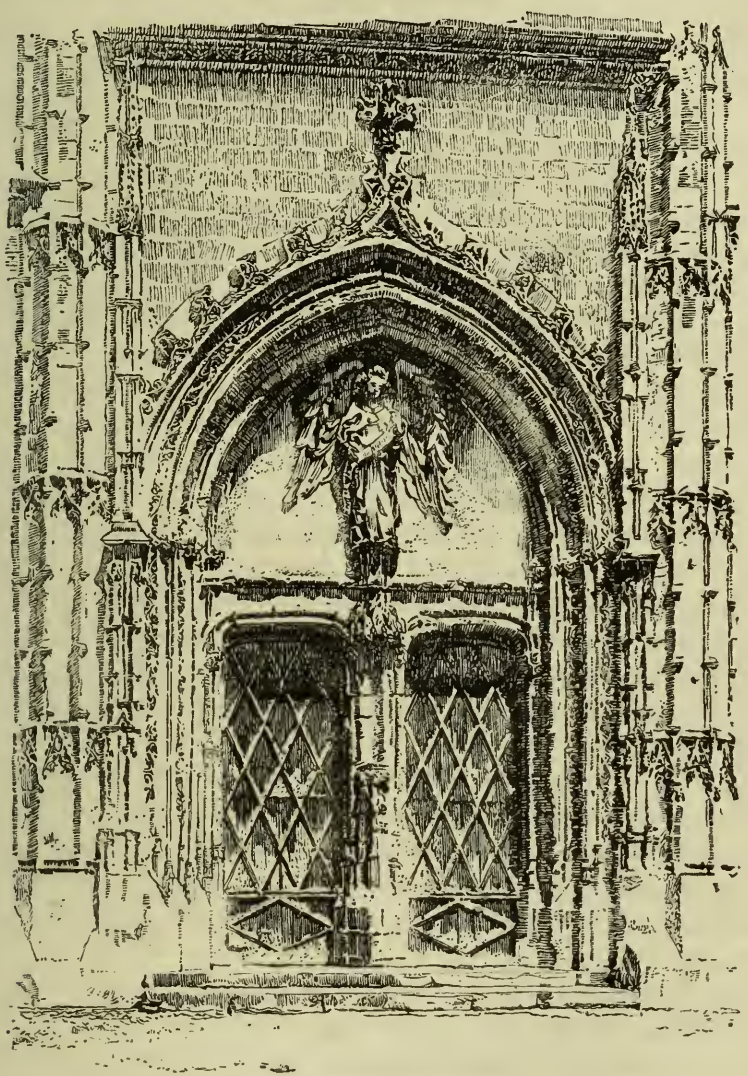
It is interesting also to pilot Nurse Long about the streets of Palma. Everything is new and strange to her, who has never been abroad before. It is a sudden change to another world; and her remarks upon all she sees, her wonder and surprise, are very refreshing. She much admires the effect of the mantillas, and I fancy is meditating this change of costume, under pretence that a bonnet is too hot for the climate. Of course vanity is really at the bottom of the idea; but we can fancy ourselves into anything, and personal deception is the commonest of human weaknesses. Her favourite shop is the pastrycook's, to which we pay regular and devoted visits: her favourite sweetmeat, burnt almonds of the most refined description. She tells me they help to keep her awake at night.

Nurse Long's costume attracts great attention in our walks. Nothing like it has ever been seen. If she paraded up and down the Rambla at the fashionable hour, she would make a sort of Royal Progress. The crowd would divide to let her pass. They cannot quite make it out. Her dress is not that of a nun; as certainly it is not that of a person living the ordinary life of the world. She must be something apart.

The doctor is equally the hero of the hour; in the ladies' eyes much more so. He is much admired. They have declared that he

is an Adonis in face and form. The fact of his having come all the way from England proves him gifted with supernatural powers. They may not be gifts of healing, but they must be supernatural.

Fortunately, our earlier walk is taken at an hour when the fashionable world is still invisible. We can patrol the streets, and visit the prison, and enter the churches, and point out to Nurse Long all the



DOORWAY OF LONJA.

beauties and wonders and distinctive features of the town, without attracting too much notice. But sometimes the doctor and I stroll upon the fashionable Rambla at the fashionable hour, and then we are the observed of all observers. Of course the doctor is the lion; I am merely the lion's keeper.

Our earlier walk generally lands us at my dungeon. This is almost as certain as that the needle draws to the pole. It lies on the way to the telegraph office; and regularly, night and morning, the doctor telegraphs a bulletin to England. After the hot outside glare, the

rooms of the dungeon are cool and refreshing. As we cross the courtyard, I point out to Nurse Long a fathomless abyss, down which, night by night, I escape death and destruction. She shudders and turns pale.

We mount the staircase, and I open the doors with my passe-partout. We enter the silent, shuttered rooms, lofty, large, and echoing. I describe to her my nightly emotions as I tread them, lonely and alone, in impenetrable darkness. Nurse Long is very emotional. She turns faint, and sinks into a chair. It is an American rocking-chair, and inconvenient for fainting purposes: so she thinks better of it.

There is lemonade on the table, duly made and left there by the ever-devoted Catalina, for my especial refreshment on arriving in the small hours of the night. Nurse Long accepts a reviving draught. It matches so well the refreshing coolness of the rooms, that I can do no less than offer one to the doctor. He, too, accepts it—and returns to the charge. This takes place regularly every morning; so that regularly every night I find myself in the position of Mother Hubbard's dog. My bottle is empty. Mother Hubbard's dog probably howled: I do not howl. Catalina is under the happy delusion that I thoroughly appreciate her lemonade. Every morning when she arrives, the bottle is as dry as some of the Mallorcan wells that suddenly became exhausted after the earthquake in April. If Catalina only knew it, I also am quite as dry as either the bottle or the wells.

When Nurse Long has quite revived, and the doctor has quite finished the lemonade; looking very much like Oliver, but knowing that it is useless to ask for more; we go into the garden to pick flowers for A.

Immediately the room containing the fifty milliner young women is in commotion. It becomes the arena of a pantomime. Their faces have all more or less grown pale with anxiety. They clasp their hands, and in dumb motion ask for news of the invalid. Is he better? Is there more hope? They catch sight of the nurse's costume, and for a moment their feminine nature asserts itself. Their thoughts are diverted by curiosity. But only for a moment. They turn to the doctor, and sign to him that if he will only restore A. to health and the palace, they will for ever remember him in their prayers. All are shedding tears, and a few are sobbing. After all, I think the Mallorcans must be very warm-hearted, with a great deal of nice feeling and sentiment about them.

Suddenly, in the midst of this emotion, it is evident that a step is heard upon the stairs: the step of the duenna or female Gorgon who superintends this galaxy of Mallorcan beauty. The transformation scene is startling, rapid, and complete. A sudden rush, a scramble, a scraping of chairs, and the windows are deserted. The click of fifty needles is distinctly heard. They appear to be working as for a wager.

But, on mature consideration, I am surprised at all the interest and emotion exhibited by these industrious young women. As I have told you, A. paid them no attention whatever; never looked at them; never talked to them or sent them bouquets from his garden; voted them a nuisance; sat with his back turned to them in our frequent lounges and siestas under the trees. He even went so far as to ask me whether I thought he might venture to petition the lady Gorgon to have the window frames fastened down, and filled in with ground glass. On the whole, I thought not. It seemed rather hard to deprive fifty lovesick but industrious young women of fresh air, and blue skies, and heaven's pure light. I advised him to bear his burden until it became quite insupportable.

For my own part, I see nothing insupportable in the situation. Many of the girls are extremely pretty; some quite ladylike; all are modest and well-conducted; exceedingly so. I think they ought to be encouraged. Were it my own case, I should send them bouquets to brighten their great barn of a room; confections from the pastry-cook's to sweeten their prosy lives. But, perhaps, A.'s is the wiser course. It may be born of experience, too. You see they are not likely to fall in love with me. Nobody ever does. A bookworm, as A. put it, who spends his days in translating verses from the Hebrew and his nights in study, which not only is wasting to oil but to beauty also.

But if these industrious and sensible and modest young women have fallen in love with A., I can only say that I don't wonder at it. They have shown their good taste as well as their sense. Think of their daily lives; the dull routine of their work; their few distractions; one day resembling another; les années qui se suivent et se ressemblent. Then suddenly the empty palace is inhabited. They have never before had such a neighbour; they never will again. Earth has become paradise. This garden has become Eden, as yet without an Eve. Ah! if only one of them were noble, and might aspire——But, alas! they are none of them noble, and must not aspire.

Then, on the other hand, think of A. But no, you cannot think of him. You do not know him. There are things beyond the imagination. The blue of southern skies; the rainbow atmospheres of the East; the soft beauty of the Andalusians; the perfections of unseen Greek sculpture; the song of the bird in the Garden of Armida; the dreams of the lotus-eater; the helpless, hopeless condition of these fifty young women. "'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all." Is this true? At least it must depend on the nature of the loss.

The world is full of misunderstandings and wrong impressions. We are all at hopelessly cross purposes one with another. Life is a game at the Rules of Contrary. It always has been so; it always will be so; until that day arrives, already foretold, when men will be

able to read each other's thoughts. Then, no doubt, speech: only given to man it is said to conceal thought: will be done away with. As concealment will then no longer be possible, speech, on the principle of the survival of the fittest, must die out.

But as I do not wish to intrude upon you the elements of logic, metaphysics, or philosophy: lest, endeavouring to show my wisdom, I prove my folly by getting out of my depth: we will return to our sheep.

So in our daily visits to the dungeon, we gather for A. a fresh bouquet of flowers: rich plumbago, gorgeous geraniums, sweet verbena and scented jessamine: we cross the silent and desolate rooms, and pass out into the street. Our next visit is to the telegraph office, and we consult as to how we can give most consolation without unduly raising hopes in those that are afar off. We never send to-day's message without wondering what to-morrow will bring forth. Will the day come when we shall be able to flash the words: Out of danger? And yet another day and a last, with the one word: Convalescent?

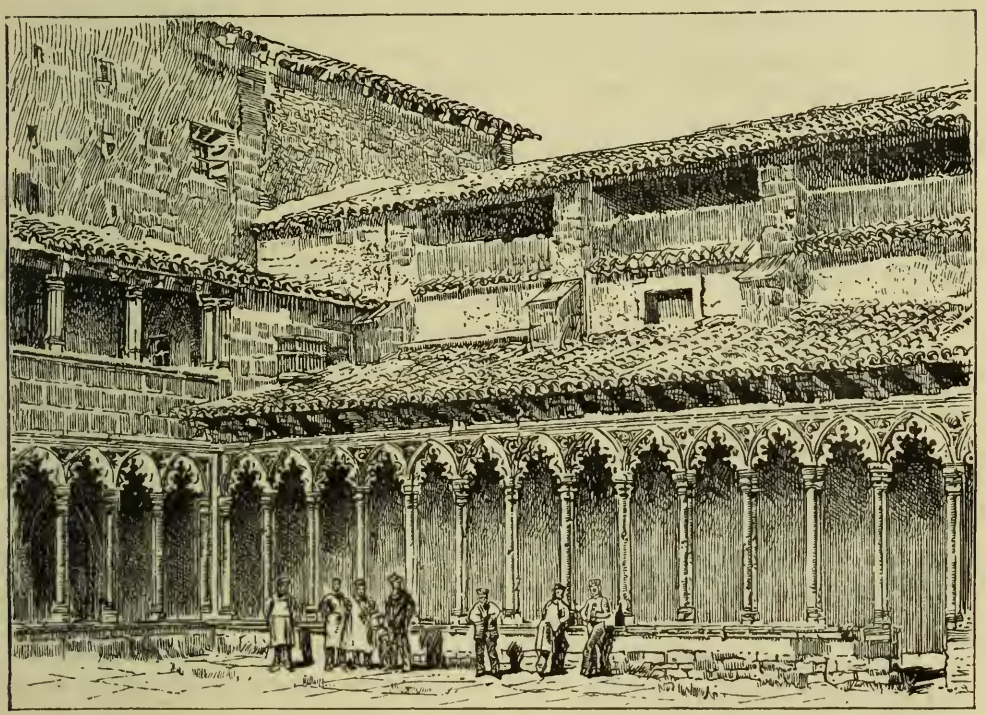
In the meantime, the days pass. Anxiety is our portion; alternate hope and fear; the improvement of one hour giving way to the relapse of the next. It is unusual; it is puzzling and discouraging. Dr. Fitzgilbert is doing everything that skill and attention, thought and experience, can suggest: but the enemy is not subdued. The intense heat of the weather makes the task almost impossible, or would seem to do so. It is most unusual heat, even for Palma, and cannot be described; quite a different heat from anything English; hotter than the hottest day ever experienced in our island. You cannot imagine it. I revel in it: the only one of our little community to whom it seems to come with healing on its wings. The extreme heat of the South, the dry, bracing air of a Norwegian winter, to me both are alike good. Here, I try to heighten my enjoyment by the force of contrast: by imagining that you are all suffering from East winds and all the discomforts of an English climate.

Barbara has become reconciled to the change of doctors and treatment; has at length received Dr. Fitzgilbert into her good graces. The citadel of her heart was only gradually stormed, but, like the slow changes of a barometer, it is more likely to last. For either of us I believe she would take a pilgrimage, or do penance, in the dead of night. No one knows when she goes to bed or when she gets up. My impression is that for the occasion she has become endowed with superhuman faculties. She is a mystery for the time being; as impenetrable as the Sphinx, as obscure as the Oracle. But a Sphinx, an Oracle, altogether benevolent and well-disposed.

She still goes to early morning church, armed with her capacious basket. The day would not begin well for Barbara if she did not tell her beads under that sacred roof. Then she flits away to market; an interesting figure, hurrying leisurely (if you can make anything of the expression) through the picturesque streets of this ever picturesque Palma de Mallorca. The sun has risen; everything is bright and

glowing and glorious; the very sensation of existence is an exquisite pleasure; you are exhilarated, you are intoxicated with this ether; your burden of care has just fallen from you; your skeleton has evaporated; you feel spiritualised; you have taken the wings of the morning; your grosser earthly nature has been left behind, with your skeleton and your care; and on those wings of the morning you mount, you fly through space, into eternal, illimitable regions. It is ecstasy as true as it is rare. Make the most of it when it comes.

I have told you, *maintes et maintes fois*, as the old French, patois-loving servants of our childhood used to say to us, that we are



PRISON CLOISTERS.

in Barbara's good graces. But this is as nothing, compared with the favour into which she has received Nurse Long. Probably, with one of her own sex, she thinks that she may venture more. To her she has become, for Barbara, almost affectionate and demonstrative. She watches her movements; seeks every opportunity to do her a kindness; suggests anything that she thinks will be for her comfort. Suddenly she will throw her arms round her in a large, comprehensive, motherly embrace. We should not like that. At least I can speak for myself. I decline to make rash assertions on behalf of the doctor, for which he might call me to account. Besides, I am not so sure of him as of myself.

Barbara stands over Nurse Long at her meals, forcing her to eat. Poor Nurse has no appetite, and Barbara is concerned about her.

This enervating heat is very trying, and to Nurse it is a new experience. Night after night of course she has to keep vigil, and for my own part, I marvel whence comes her strength and energy. She is small and delicate-looking, yet after nights of watching seems as fresh and lively and ready for work as ever. She is now single-handed, and Dr. Fitzgilbert tells me he believes she will inevitably break down without further help. Of that I think there can be no doubt. Human nature cannot go on for ever, like—once more and for the last time—Tennyson's brook.

Further help is not to be had in Palma de Mallorca. The reason that Nurse Long is now single-handed, is in this wise:—When the Sister Superior heard of the arrival of the English nurse, she sent a very polite message to the effect that Sister Cecilia's services having, in her opinion, now become superfluous, she had better retire from the scene.

"I think so too," said Dr. Fitzgilbert. "She is really no longer of any use. She is too inexperienced to relieve Nurse Long at night, and at all other times we can do without her. It would, indeed, be rather embarrassing if she remained, for she would be rather in the way."

"But Sister Cecilia is A.'s favourite," our host remarked. "He will miss her, and will throw himself into a terrible state of agitation; work himself up into a higher state of temperature than ever. That would be the last straw."

"It cannot be helped," replied the doctor. "Sister Cecilia is very amiable, but she is useless; and even if we wanted her ever so, you see the Sister Superior objects to her remaining."

"She probably thinks of *les convenances*. With a houseful of bachelors ——"

"Oh, really!" interrupted the doctor, with virtuous indignation. "I am sure that everyone here is like the Chevalier Bayard, sans peur et sans reproche."

"I should make a poor figure as a chevalier," timidly murmured Nurse Long. She was assisting at the consultation, for the subject really concerned her more than anyone else. "But with regard to Sister Cecilia's resignation" (you might have thought it treated of a change of ministry), "I believe that if you were to reason with Mr. A. ——"

"How reason with a man who has lost his reason?" I ventured to say. "But, in the present instance, I think you are creating a difficulty: turning a molehill into a mountain. A.'s preference for Sister Cecilia is one of delirium. He will no more remark her absence than he is really conscious of his preference. All you have to do is to say nothing to him about it."

So Sister Cecilia departed, and Nurse Long entered upon her solitary reign. We were very sorry to lose the Sister. She was very sorry to go. She was very soft and sweet and pleasant. When she

bade us farewell, tears trembled in her voice—and in her eyes. I don't believe they were all for A. Dear Sister Cecilia.

A day or two passed on, and then James, as I had prophesied, gave in. Typhoid fever had unmistakably set its seal upon him. Troubles were increasing, complications were coming upon us. Who next might not be attacked by this fell disease?

"I really don't know what's to be done," said Dr. Fitzgilbert that night, as we were taking our evening stroll together. "Things are growing serious. If Nurse Long was likely to knock up with one invalid on hand, she will certainly never stand the strain of two."

Every evening about half-past ten, we go out for a walk under the night skies. The town is quiet; the clear sky is studded with its moving constellations and flashing stars; the streets are deserted; "all the air a solemn stillness holds;" everything on earth or above it suggests infinite repose. It is the pleasantest hour of the twenty-four.

We generally begin with the breakwater, and watch the lights of the fishing-boats gleaming upon the sea. We pass the cabaret upon the quay, almost at the commencement of the breakwater, and the silence and darkness are broken by a sudden glare and noise. Within the house, men and women are dancing the wild, uncouth dances of this sunny south. Their feet beat time like castanets to the twanging of music. Every now and then a shout, or a burst of laughter, or a cry that would do honour to a wild Indian, points the end of a figure. Ungraceful as it all is, wild and abandoned, its effect is not half so horrible as that of their unearthly singing.

Without, a quieter set are seated at tables. One man twangs a sort of native mandoline, whilst another sings to the accompaniment. Generally the song is merely a prolonged series of melancholy howls, long-drawn and horribly vibrant—to coin an adjective; but to-night the voice is not bad, and would not be unmusical if the song bore the faintest trace of melody. Of this there is none. We do not understand the words, and we may be sure that our ignorance in this case is bliss. They make them up as they go along, and call it improvising. When the ideas come slowly, the howls are indefinitely prolonged; sometimes die out at last for want of breath and inspiration. Fancy these "rude barbarians" improvising. What can they know of poetry? of love, and beauty, and sentiment? of everything that is refined and ethereal?—all so necessary to this peculiar genius. The Isles of Greece had their Sappho; Italy her Corinne, inspired by Madame de Staël; but I have met with no humble follower, even in passionate Spain and sunny Mallorca.

To-night we leave this tintamarre behind us, very willingly. As we go further from it, the wild instruments inside and out mingle their discords. It would do very well for a bacchanalian revelry in Pandemonium. We reach the end of the breakwater. Here we are out of sight and sound of profane orgies. It is a very different and a very marvellous scene; the very essence of poetry, indeed; of love,

beauty, and sentiment in its purest type. The sea plashes gently at our feet; washes and surges over the great stones and rocks. The shooting stars leave long tracks of light behind them, dying out in the eternal silence of space.

"I don't know what's to be done," muses Dr. Fitzgilbert. "Without more help, Nurse Long will knock up; we shall all knock up. And help is not to be found in Palma. If I had only known, and brought out two nurses with me instead of one!"

"A.'s want of progress is very discouraging," I remark. "It really seems as if the fever might be indefinitely prolonged. I fear, too, it will go hard with James. He has long been depressed, and has visions of leaving his bones in a foreign land. His vitality is low. All that is against him."

"A.'s condition is more than discouraging," said the doctor. "It is inexplicable. It does not yield an inch to ordinary measures. I have tried every earthly thing, without apparent result. All I can say is that he is no worse than when I arrived. I strongly begin to suspect that he is suffering from what is called Mediterranean or Malta Typhoid, of which of course I have had no experience. If so, he never will get really better until he leaves the island."

"That sounds alarming," I said. "What should we have done if you had not come over?"

The doctor was modestly silent. No answer, indeed, was necessary. One knew only too well what we should have done, and what would have happened, in all human probability.

But the present dilemma was serious. No one could afford to knock up from overwork. And there was just a chance of others falling ill too. For some time, I, for instance, had been subjected to the same influences as A.; was still inhabiting the dungeon, where, it seemed probable, lay the seat of danger. Why should not I also become victim No. 3?

"Why not telegraph for another nurse?" I suggested. "You will want her; you want her now; and you may as well have her before it is too late."

"The very thing I have been trying to persuade myself to do," replied Dr. Fitzgilbert. "As you say, we want help even now. In fact, we cannot possibly do without it."

"And if you telegraph to-night, there will be just time for her to catch next Monday's boat," I added, by way of strengthening the argument.

"Let's think it over as we go along," cried the doctor.

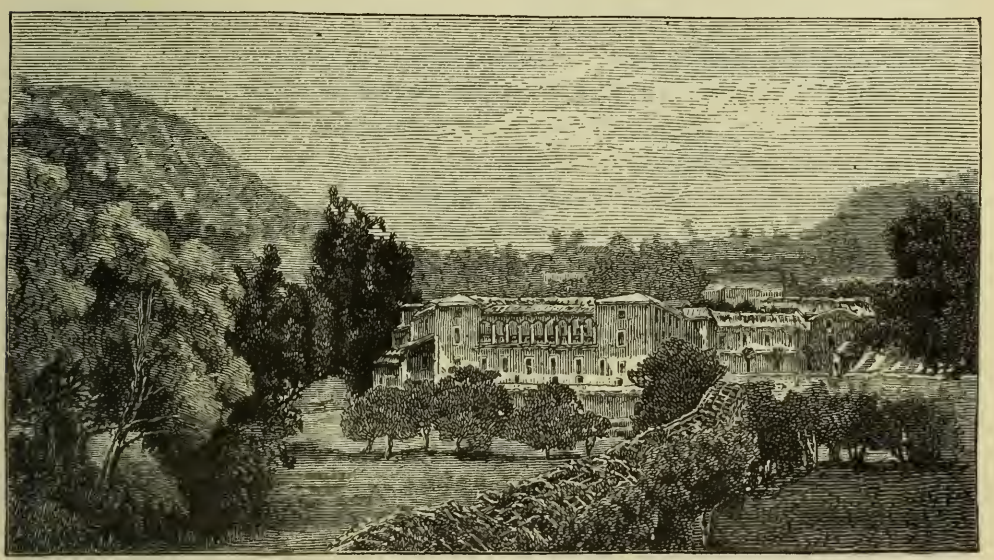
We were then on our way to the telegraph office, our nightly mission in our nightly walk. It is just opposite the old Moorish fountain, to which you have been introduced. The walk through the town is delicious. The echo of our footsteps breaks the silence of night. The old watchmen turn their lanterns upon us when we meet them, and throw us a "Buenas noches, Señores!" Perhaps afar

off we hear one proclaiming the hour, and the serenity of the skies. Here and there a gay cavalier stands beneath his lady's balcony, murmuring love vows. She listens—and believes them. A screech-owl never fails to fly over the town with unearthly sound—Shakespeare's "shrieking harbinger."

> "Whilst the scritch-owl, scritching loud,
> Puts the wretch that lies in woe
> In remembrance of a shroud."

The imprisoned quail repeats his mournful note, his monotonous protest. He never seems to sleep: the wakefulness of a Promethean vulture, without its cruelty.

"Why not telegraph to-night?" I said, just as we were passing the



MALLORCAN COUNTRY HOUSE.

photographer's. There all was silent and closed. The poor man was resting from his trouble—for he, like everyone else, has his burden to bear. Just now it is anxiety for his only child: a bright little fellow of four or five, who seems to be going off just as an elder brother did a year or two ago. This child is the apple of the father's eye, the delight of his existence. If he is to follow his brother, as well that he and his wife should go too, he thinks. To come home and find the nest empty and spoiled—we know what it does for the birds; but the suffering of the human heart is past fathoming.

The photographer is intelligent. He believes in English doctors. When I told him that one was coming over, he besought me to bring him to his child. He would give the world for his opinion and advice—half his substance. I told him it should be done, and without any tax upon his hardly-earned resources.

So, one morning we went together. Dr. Fitzgilbert had a good look at the little fellow; examined and sounded him carefully; told

the father the best medicines to give him; advised him as to the best way of bringing him up. "Delicate, and needing great care," he said, in reply to the father's anxious desire for a frank opinion. "But if you can get him through the next three years, you may save him."

To-night, I say, all is quiet at the photographer's, wrapt in darkness. He rests from his labour, and probably in sleep has found oblivion from a haunting fear that by day robs him of half his working power.

By the time we reached the telegraph office, the doctor has made up his mind and the message goes forth.

"James down with typhoid. Must have more help. Send out another nurse."

The clock pointed to midnight as the words were handed in. Another day had begun for Palma: another day in the race of life.

The message was sent.

It was done, and we felt that it was well done. When it was beyond recall, this came over us with conviction—at all times a pretty sure sign that we have done wisely.

We returned to the Consulate, where I stayed until two o'clock. Then, as usual, I set out on my walk to the dungeon. The doctor accompanies me as far as the photographer's, but no farther. Up to this point the way is plain sailing. After that it becomes intricate, with impossible turnings and windings. A comparative stranger would hopelessly lose himself. I lose myself, sometimes, though never hopelessly. In this respect I am like a cat and always fall on my feet.

Besides this, it is soon after passing the photographer's (when the fashionable portion of the town commences) that picturesque Romeos are whispering love vows to graceful and confiding Juliets. The ladies are generally drooping over balconies, beautiful with wrought iron work of delicate design. Now I am quite sure of myself, as I have told you before; but how feel sure of the doctor? He might murder one of these gay Lotharios; entangle himself in an affair of the heart; bring forth a tragedy greater, and certainly more embarrassing, than that which overtook the Houses of Capulet and Montagu. In short, land us in an all-round state of confusion worse confounded.

So at the photographer's I wisely part from him, and pursue my solitary way alone. I reach the dungeon, unmolested, unmolesting. I enter the great gates and grope my way through the courtyard. I narrowly escape breaking my neck by climbing outside the first flight of stairs instead of inside. As you have heard, there is a fathomless abyss here, a bottomless pit. It is pitch dark; inky black; Egyptian darkness. The other nine plagues of Egypt are not here; but mosquitoes may count as three or four of them rolled into one. H. C., at Manacor, I remember, declared they were the whole ten distilled into a concentrated essence for his especial torment. Perhaps they were, and the results they brought forth were as mar-

vellous as they were visible. But you have not forgotten the little episode in the old man's boat: how he passed up a keg of Anisette that was worth a guinea a drop; how it fell into H. C.'s hands; and how when it reached mine, the keg, like Mother Hubbard's Cupboard—to quote that lady once more—was dry and empty. I have not forgotten it. I shall never forget it.

I reach the door at last and let myself in. Night after night the ordeal grows a little more formidable. Continual dropping will wear away a stone. The silence and solemnity of the great rooms become more and more appalling. The solitude is more insupportable. I think of the days when A. and I were here together, enjoying each other's companionship; when, if our voices did not exactly "make music" in our ears, at least they sounded very much like it.

I find my way to the oval room, our old dining-room, and light my lamp. The shadows it casts grow a little longer every night; more weird, mysterious, portentous. I am evidently growing nervous. This nightly weight of solitude is taking effect. I have never been deficient in moral courage (it is useless to be *always* modest), but I have never had to go through this nightly ordeal. Can you imagine the silence and solitude of a deserted palace? The ghosts of past recollections with which it is peopled? I wonder how long I shall hold out? Was it for this that I came out from England; came out with nerves already unstrung and vitality at its lowest ebb?

The day following the doctor's summons for more help, came a message from England.

"Your request attended to. Nurse Little leaves on Friday evening. Telegraph Interpreter at Barcelona to meet train at Portbou."

We looked at each other. *Nurse Little.* Could this be possible? or was it a joke on the part of the telegraph officials? or a misprint? For it frequently happens that a message as it is delivered here, bears not the faintest resemblance to the message that left England. Or was it simply one of those coincidences that happen in life over and over again; proving every day of our lives that truth is stranger than fiction?

"Why," exclaimed the doctor, "the long and the short of it is—no, I don't mean it for a play upon the words—but the long and the short of it is, that we shall get into hopeless confusion."

"It is certainly a strange coincidence," I said.

"It must be a misprint," decided the doctor. "I, for one, never come across these coincidences in real life."

"Depend upon it, you will find it here for once," I replied. "Somehow it looks genuine. And as things generally go by contrary, and as Nurse Long is very short, you may take it for granted that Nurse Little will be extremely tall."

It was the doctor's turn to laugh. "I think you are a bit of a pessimist," he cried. "Confess it."

"Not at all. Although things generally go by contraries, I have a firm conviction that all things come right in the end."

"What will be the end of our present complications?" laughed the doctor. "Nurse Little, Nurse Long; tall and short by inverse ratio. There will be no getting over it. It is frightful to contemplate. However; more help is coming; that is the chief thing, and I am relieved. I am thankful."

More days passed on. The boat containing Nurse Little was again due on the Tuesday morning. This time the doctor undertook to meet it. Nurse Long, keeping watch in the sick-room, could see it approaching from afar off. As soon as it was in sight, the doctor was to be called, and would then go down to the quay. It was a very simple matter.

Tuesday morning brought the boat true to its time, and with it, arrived Nurse Little. Of course we were right, and she proved extremely tall; dignified and commanding.

Nurse Little, though quite young, has had a great deal of experience, especially in typhoid fever. On first arriving she thought very seriously, almost the worst, of A.'s condition. It depressed us greatly. She was fresh to the case, could form an unbiassed opinion, and it was unfavourable. It seemed our own fears put into words. And as day after day passes, and he makes no visible progress, we know not what to think. Are we to begin to despair? Even the doctor says there must soon be a change for the better, or he shall lose heart.

James, on the other hand, has it well. No complications, no delirium—because no lung affection. His worst symptom is want of vitality; extreme prostration. It remains to be seen whether he can battle with this.

And my own days are now growing short here. The weeks have passed, and it is time everyone who can do so escaped from the excessive and advancing heat. My next letter will probably be the last I shall ever write to you or to anyone from this pleasant and sunny Palma de Mallorca. Life is too short, the world too large for repeated visits to the same spot. But I trust I may not depart before this wearing uncertainty has happily terminated, and the dark shadows so long hovering about us have fled before the sunshine of returning health.

Fare you well, my sister. Soon the wanderer will return, though only for a short season: and another watcher will bear you company beside our desolate hearth.

WEARY.

"If thou would'st happy be ——"

"Nay, 'tis not happiness I seek, but rest!
Once I sought joy, but long since found the quest
Was fruitless, and returned, to tread with pain
This vale of misery."

"And thou would'st gain
Crown without Cross!"

"Ah no! could I but see
The distant goal—that were enough for me.
But to toil on and on unceasingly,
Groping in darkness, bowed with crushing grief,
Knowing not where to find aught of relief—
The burden is too great! If but one star,
With faint, still light could beckon from afar,
One smile fall earthward from that distant Land,
Whither I too would journey——"

"And whose strand
Can but be reached through suffering and woe.
Nor can *thy* rest be won till thou shalt know
That rest and weariness alike are good;
That joy and sorrow mingle in one flood.
—See how yon ship returns with favouring breeze,
After long battling with tempestuous seas."

"Aye—storm-tossed, rudderless, drifts on those hidden rocks
And sinks, in sight of home; the frequent shocks
Too great for its spent strength.
The waters deep
Enfold that shattered craft. Thus would I sleep—
I am so weary now——"

"Peace, it is best:
Live on, nor thus despair. Toil ends in Rest."

S.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

A DARK DEED.

By E. Blair Leighton.

HOWEVER innocent one may be, it is certainly an unpleasant thing to be even suspected of having taken part in the perpetration of a foul and dastardly crime. That happened once to be my unfortunate position, and I give the facts as they really occurred.

My first studio was the front drawing-room of a small house in Notting Hill. It was within a few minutes' walk of my home, and had the additional advantage of being hardly more than a stone's throw from the house of my intimate friend and brother-brush, E. This proximity both he and I found convenient, as it enabled us to mutually accommodate one another with the loan of various properties: costumes, and other things incidental to painting. What I lacked he frequently had, and *vice versa;* and many were the mysterious-looking bundles that were conveyed from house to house.

Amongst those properties of mine which my friend had occasion to borrow from time to time was an ancient, stuffed lay-figure; a perfect veteran in her way, which had probably played leading parts in the works of some long since defunct old master. Age had not enhanced her charms; and whatever she might have resembled in her palmier days, at the time I speak of she could boast of neither grace nor symmetry. I had purchased her for a small sum from an artist, who was giving up his studio in town with the idea of travelling for a time, and did not wish to be hampered by taking a lady with him.

At the time she came into my possession one shoulder and both her ankles were dislocated, several fingers were missing, and she also suffered from an internal and chronic hemorrhage of sawdust, under which she was visibly wasting away. For all that, however, she was still of some use. In love scenes she played a good passive part, and, if carefully propped up, would be a great aid in painting anything exceptionally elaborate in the way of a skirt.

Dummy—for so I was in the habit of familiarly terming her—had been on a rather protracted visit at E.'s, and as I was in need of her services myself, and knew that E. had finished with her, I arranged with him that, under cover of the night, we should convey her home. This, on account of other engagements, we were obliged to postpone until a late hour, when I was to go and fetch her in a cab.

Accordingly, at about half-past eleven that night, I engaged a four-wheeler at the end of E.'s road. Having forgotten the number of

his house, but remembering that it had formerly been inhabited by a doctor, I told cabby to drive me to a house about half-way down the street which had a red lamp over the door.

When I arrived the windows were all dark, the only light being that of the doctor's lamp. E. quietly let me in, and he and I shortly after reappeared, bearing in our arms the inanimate form of Dummy, closely wrapped round with some large, ancient shawls. Remembering her infirmities, we bore her tenderly down the steps and up to the cab, the driver of which was watching the whole proceeding with considerable interest.

"Be careful with her head," I said to E., as we lifted her in; "it's very nearly off."

Hereupon, cabby, with a politeness not usually met with in those of his class, stepped down from his seat and proffered his assistance. We told him, however, we did not require any, and seated her with a heavy bump, her back to the horse, and her head at the same time nearly going through the front window of the cab. In answer to his inquiries, I told him she was all right, and instructed him to drive round to my number in the next road.

In a few minutes we reached the house, which was all perfectly dark. I jumped out of the cab, ran up the steps, and opened the door with my latch-key. There was no light in the passage, the people of the house having all gone to bed. However, as I knew my way up those stairs pretty well, I could easily dispense with that until I got to my own room. So leaving the street door open, I ran down the steps again to the cab, and helped E. to struggle out with our inanimate burden.

Cabby once more kindly offered his aid, but I told him she was not very heavy, and the two of us could manage perfectly well. So E. taking her under the arms, and I holding her round the knees, we carried her, creaking in her joints, up the steps, and into the passage.

Thinking my friend was going to pay the cab-fare, and not wishing him to do so, I cried hastily: "Don't for goodness' sake put her down in the dark, or we shall never pick her up again. And if her head drops off we shall wake all the people of the house." Saying this, I went to the bottom of the steps where cabby was waiting for his fare.

"What's up with her?" he said, as I put the money into his hand.

"Neck broken," I replied.

"Badly?" he asked.

"Yes," said I; "head nearly off."

"What are you going to do with her?" continued cabby.

"Paint her," I answered.

"For a lark?" said he.

What he meant by that I could not stay to inquire, as considerable

growling was proceeding from the dark passage where poor E. was still standing, hugging Dummy. Therefore I abruptly answered cabby's last question, by saying :

"No ; she's a lay-figure."

"Oh ! is she," said cabby, looking perplexed, evidently wondering what sort of creature that might be, but not liking to show his ignorance by further inquiries.

I closed the street door. We carried Dummy up to my painting room, and deposited her on a chair in the corner, when E. and I had a good hearty laugh over the little adventure.

The hour being late and our mission accomplished, my friend and I very shortly started for home. At the street corner we separated, and as I said good night to E., I heard someone across the road remark in a hoarse voice : "Those are the fellers." Turning to see by whom the observation was made, I recognised our late Jehu in close confab with a representative of the law. However, my conscience being easy, I paid no further heed to the remark, but proceeded on my way homeward.

The following morning at my usual hour I arrived at —— Road. Quite forgetful of the previous night's adventure, I proceeded upstairs and into my room, and was about to close the door when I saw my landlady pursuing me with an expression of face which plainly showed she had something unpleasant to communicate.

"I am sorry to tell you, Mr. L.," she said, in a somewhat chilling manner, "that three men—two of them policemen—came to make inquiries about you early this morning."

As my complexion did not undergo any sudden change at this announcement, she proceeded in a less austere manner, but still watching me closely.

"They say that you and someone else were seen to bring a body round from a doctor's house in the next road ; and one of the men who conveyed you in his cab says you told him the poor creature's throat was cut, and her head nearly off, and that you said you were going to give her a coat of paint. He told me her groans as you carried her up the steps were quite dreadful."

"Where are they ?" I asked, ready to explode with laughter.

"I told the three of them," proceeded my landlady, "that I felt sure there must be some mistake. If I had not been so decided I really believe they would have insisted on breaking open your door ; but they agreed to return later, when I said I knew you would admit them into your room to look for themselves. They have just arrived."

"Very well," said I ; "tell them to come up."

My landlady ran down a few stairs and called over the banisters, and her invitation to step up was promptly followed by a tramping which conveyed a terrible sense of the weight and majesty of the law. In course of time, the three men reached my landing, and scarcely

deigning to notice me walked straight into the room with my landlady at their heels. After a hurried glance round, the foremost policeman exclaimed exultantly: "There she is," and at the same time pointed to a dark corner where poor Dummy sat just as we had put her down overnight.

I must say she presented a ghastly appearance; one calculated to inspire horror in the mind of anyone outside the profession, and consequently not hardened to such sights.

There in the gloom, wrapped about with a tattered piece of drapery sat Dummy, looking for all the world like the unfortunate victim of some foul crime. Her head, which was covered by the shawl, had dropped on to her breast, and one or two straggling whisps of hair peeped out through the folds on her shoulders. For the first time in my life I really admired my old lay-figure. Her long training in tragedy seemed to have at last borne fruit, and for once she appeared to have really thrown herself into the spirit of the situation.

"What is she doing here?" said the sergeant, turning to me.

"Nothing," said I. "It is only my lay-figure, as I told the cabman last night."

But the constables, seeming to have no clearer notion than the cabby of what a lay-figure might be, I walked up to it and pulled the drapery aside, when down fell the papier-maché head on to the floor. There was a chorus of ejaculations from the men and a slight scream from my landlady, and I proceeded to explain that the wretched object in the corner was a model I occasionally used to paint from, and that the previous night I had brought her back from the house of an artist friend who had borrowed her for a time.

The mystery being thus cleared up, all present, with the exception of the cabby, thoroughly appreciated the joke. The drollery of the occurrence, however, did not seem quite so apparent to him. His sense of humour was possibly somewhat blunted by the consciousness that he had made himself look rather foolish. But when I suggested that they should all three adjourn to the "Castle," just round the corner, and drink something to my health and the speedy recovery of the unfortunate victim, even cabby sided with the rest in considering that, on the whole, it was a satisfactory and pleasant termination to what had appeared to him the night before a very awful and suspicious tragedy.

STRAIGHT FROM THE PLAIN.

A BRIGHT June day: and a pretty girl seated by the window of a small room in a snug old country Rectory, sewing busily. Her cheeks wore a pink flush, and her hot fingers trembled a little as she plied the needle, for she had just heard news to set her pulses beating.

Outside, the white-haired old Rector was tying up his sweet peas, which grew just under the window; lifting his head every now and then to talk to his daughter over the sill of the low frame, its sash thrown up to the summer air.

"What did you say, child?—Am I sure? Why of course I'm sure. That is, I'm sure they told me. Mrs. Parker received the letter this morning."

"But, papa, he was not expected before August."

"Got tired of his rovings, maybe. Anyway, the two gardeners said their master was expected back to-morrow evening, and a cargo of valuable luggage had already arrived and was being unpacked. I saw the two men as I passed the Court gates just now, and they gave me the news. In a fine heat and bustle both of them were: afraid, I suppose, that they will not have the gardens straight in time."

"He has not been gone a year yet, papa: and he said he might stay away two years, if you remember."

"And I said that when he did come he would probably bring a wife with him; I remember that."

"Perhaps he will," said the girl.

"Perhaps he won't—if he's coming now," contended the Rector. "Had he married, we should have heard of it: and he wouldn't be likely to bring home a wife without ordering the Court to make ready for her. You speak without thinking, Anna. By the way, child, I forgot to tell you that I met Doctor Reeves at the post office, and he asked me to dine with him this evening."

"I feel glad of that, papa."

She felt very glad, for she knew that her father would get a good dinner. The Rector's stipend was a small one, nothing like two hundred a-year, and they must be economical in all ways, as part of the money had to go to the son, Lieutenant Castleton, who was making his way as he best could in his regiment. Whereas Doctor Reeves was an amiable old pluralist, with more thousands a-year than the Rector counted hundreds, and his dinner-table was always superb.

Mr. Castleton went off to another part of his garden. He did most of the work in it himself, not being able to afford a gardener, except for an odd day at rare intervals. Anna let her work fall on her lap—she was making herself a new muslin body—and sat looking outwards,

as if she wanted to watch her father trimming the roses. Truly, she saw neither him nor the flowers.

A few minutes, and there ran into the house by a side door, Lily Sandford, a laughing girl in a flapping old Leghorn hat. She burst into the little work-room.

"Such news, Anna! What do you think? Roger Brooke is coming home!"

"Papa has just heard so," replied Anna quietly, picking up her work and going on with it.

"My uncle went up to the Court betimes this morning. He had to see about paying some tithes, or taxes, or something or other, and he said I might walk with him. Goody Parker met us with the information that a lot of treasures had come through London from the East, and her master was following on to-morrow. I'm uncommonly glad; he will give us some more garden-parties."

"You can't forget the one he did give, Lily!" said Anna, with a laugh.

"When he made you its queen—for I'm sure that's what he did do," retorted Lily.

"How silly you are!"

"Some official kind of man came with the treasures," ran on the girl, who had sat down on the window sill and was swinging her old hat about by its yellow strings. "He was unpacking them in the big music room, Parker said, being the barest and emptiest; so I went to see, leaving Uncle in the steward's den, bothering over the accounts and blowing-up generally all round."

"And what did you see?"

"My dear, I was plunged into the mysteries of fairy-land. There are beautiful pictures without number, and without name to me; some of them painted in glowing colours, and some just in that soft light and shade, like that child's head hanging behind you, which was, I believe, given you by Roger Brooke. There are boxes of carved, scented woods as curious as the forests they come from, and vases of strange substances that I could make nothing of, and pottery hideous to behold, and lovely porcelain from many lands. The last thing the man came to and unpacked, while I stood there, was Lot's wife."

"Lot's wife?"

"Lot's wife," repeated Lily. "Anna, how queer you look!"

Anna was gazing in doubting amazement, her blue eyes wide, her pink cheeks turning crimson.

"Do you think I'm inventing?" cried Lily. "If you would just put down your work and run up to the Court, you could see it for yourself."

"But, did you *really* see it—Lot's wife?" asked Anna.

"Well, I really saw a queer, salty-looking thing, which the man called Lot's wife; 'Lot's wife, straight from the Plain,' said he to me,

condescending to add that it was a model of her taken from the figure on the Plain. It was about the size of a doll. What a goose Roger Brooke must be to bring home that!"

Lily rambled on, but Anna Castleton heard her not. Her thoughts had gone back to the past.

She was recalling a day long ago: when the handsome and rich young heir, Roger Brooke, about to set out on his travels, had stood outside this very window, his arms on its sill, as he talked to her. Love there had been between them, but never a word of it spoken. It was hardly likely, she sometimes had said to herself, that he would choose *her*, the poor daughter of the poor Rector.

"And what shall I bring you home, my little Anna?" he had asked, his fine hazel eyes going out to her with admiration, his voice suddenly grown tender as a love-song.

"Nothing," she had answered, blushing.

"But, yes; it must be. Choose something, my timid dove, and it shall be brought to you, though I go to the ends of the earth to find it."

"Bring me Lot's wife; straight from the Plain," she had said then, believing that, of all impossible things she could mention, that was the most impossible.

"Be it so," concluded Roger. "I'll bring her to you straight from the Plain."

And now if Lily Sandford might be believed, here it was—Lot's wife. He had remembered it; must be remembering *her*. Throughout all these months, when the silence to her had seemed so dreary, she had not been forgotten. Little communication had been received from Roger: a letter now and then (months between) to her father, the Rector, who had been his tutor in boyhood; a letter or two to his man of business, old Lawyer Sandford; a note or so to the housekeeper at the Court, Mrs. Parker; but never anything to Anna.

Lily departed, remarking that her aunt would be setting the crier to work. Anna dropped her face in her hands in a rush of sweet memories of the past, of brilliant fancies and anticipations for the future; and then common sense came back with a rush.

"How worse than foolish I am!" she cried, very much ashamed of herself. "Because he has brought home that ridiculous model of salt—which probably may be meant for his own gallery—I am conjuring up these dreams! Why, it means no more for me than if he had brought me a model of the Pyramids in sugar!"

Resolutely taking up her work, she was stitching away, all business-like, when she saw their servant, Molly, come whisking down the side path of the garden with some salad in her apron, which she had been to cut.

"Molly," she called out, looking from the window—and the woman came up. "Molly, you need not make that sweet omelette for dinner which I ordered. Papa dines with Dr. Reeves this even-

ing, so we can have the omelette to-morrow. The cold meat, with salad, will do to-day."

"Very well, Miss Anna," replied Molly, cheerfully, as she whisked away.

Towards evening, when the air grew cooler, and the sun was nearing its setting, and Mr. Castleton was away, eating his dinner, Anna put on her straw hat, and went forth for a stroll. Involuntarily, as it seemed, her feet took her towards the Court.

"I don't see why I should not go and take a peep at the things," she told herself by way of excuse, forgetting that qui s'excuse, s'accuse. "It is my only opportunity. After to-morrow, when *he* will be there, I could not go, unless invited."

It was only about half a mile, for the Court was very near the Rectory; and the way lay through green paths overshaded by trees, in the branches of which the birds were singing their vesper hymns of praise. A strange sadness sat in Anna's heart: only a few hours, and she should see *him* also!

"Now I will go to the door in the north terrace," she said, decisively, as she approached the Court—a handsome white structure, low and wide. "That north door is sure to be unlocked, for it's the way they must have taken the cases in: and then I need not see Mrs. Parker till I'm leaving. I don't want her with me in the music-room; she'd never cease gossiping, good old soul; I would rather look at the treasures alone. I hope she won't espy me going round!"

It fell out as she wished. The Court seemed to be in more of a bustle than ordinary—with the preparations for its master on the morrow, she supposed—and Anna passed round to the side terrace, unnoticed, and entered by the north door. It led through a passage or two straight to the music-room, which had been a bare room of late, its fine organ and piano and harp having been removed to the maker's in London for safety.

The room was anything but bare now. All kinds of articles were crowded into it, some large, some small. Pictures leaning against the walls, groups of beautiful statuary, vases, ornaments, fragile china cups, delicate filagree baskets in silver and silver gilt. Anna drew a long breath as she gazed around, bewildered, confused, excited; all was so very rare and beautiful. She took off her hat and let it fall on the floor, and pushed back her sunny hair, and looked out with strange gladness in her sweet blue eyes. And all without the slightest suspicion that Roger Brooke was looking on from the end of the room, partly hidden by the white draperies which hung over the lid of a packing case; looking at herself, the prettiest treasure there, standing in her pink summer muslin.

"But which can be Lot's wife, I wonder?"

As she spoke, she was bending over the huge, improvised table, on

which the smaller things were standing. She had said the words aloud, as people sometimes do when alone and in surprise, and she was touching an object gently here and there.

"I don't see it yet; yet it is sure to be here—Lot's wife."

"Yes, Anna, it is sure to be there—Lot's wife. I should not fail to bring *that* for you."

As the well-known voice fell on her ear, the well-known form advanced to gladden her sight. Anna gave a startled cry. Just at first she thought it must be a vision, and she backed a few steps and held up her hands.

"My dear, don't you know me?"

She knew him now, and burst into tears. Very mixed tears indeed they were, springing partly from over-wrought astonishment, from dismay, and from a blissful pulsation which was stirring her veins. What, *what* must he think of her, intruding thus into the private rooms of his home, avowedly looking for Lot's wife?

"I hope you will forgive me; I don't know how to excuse myself," she murmured in shame-faced contrition, after they had shaken hands; and he stood looking down at her with a smile, enjoying her confusion, his tall fine form drawn to its full height.

"I heard you were coming home to-morrow night."

"No doubt! everyone else here heard so," he replied. "All the fault of good Mrs. Parker. I wrote yesterday from London, and said 'expect me *to-morrow* evening.' She is still in the depths of woe and consternation, laying the blame upon her spectacles, which 'read the sense of the words wrong.' Is your father well, Anna?—my dear old friend and tutor."

"Quite well, thank you. He is dining with Dr. Reeves."

Her voice was unsteady, her hands were trembling.

"And so you came up to look for Lot's wife."

"Oh, please, please forgive me! Please forgive and forget. I will never come up again. It was all through Lily Sandford. She was here with her uncle to-day, and she told me she had seen all the beautiful things which had come and—and—Lot's wife. I thought it no harm to come and look at them too. It was very foolish of me."

"Very," gravely replied Mr. Brooke. "This is she, Lot's wife," he added, pointing out a figure in which Anna could just now see neither form nor shape. "I brought her, as you bade me, straight from the Plain. I have brought her home for my wife, Anna, and I hope she will always treasure her. Do you think she will?"

"I do not know," she answered faintly.

"Oh, but you do," he returned. "My darling,"—passing his arm round her—"you cannot have failed to understand that it was to my own future wife I promised to bring Lot's wife. Will she accept her?" he fondly whispered.

But Anna could not answer; her eyes were raining down tears of salt.

"And accept me with her? Oh, my dear one, what do you suppose has brought me home before my travels were over, but you? I could not stay away from you longer—my darling, well-loved Anna!"

The probability is that she did accept him, though she could not bring herself to say it; for when he presumed to take a kiss or two from her pretty trembling lips, the attempt she made to draw the lips away was very feeble indeed.

They walked to the Rectory under the soft hues of twilight, when the rose tints were fading from the western sky and the twinkling stars began to shine out. And when the old Rector reached home at the sober hour of ten, mellowed by Dr. Reeves' good mellow port, he hardly knew which most petrified him—the sight of Roger Brooke, or the news that Anna, with his leave, would soon quit the Rectory for the Court.

"I hardly dare give the leave," said the old man.

"Why not, sir?"

"People would never forgive me. You must know well, Roger, that not a county family but expects you to go to it for a wife."

"Likely enough," laughed Roger. "But I choose to come to you for one, sir."

"Well, well. My dear little Anna! I know not how I shall part with her."

"She will be your loving daughter still, sir, though she is my wife."

A QUESTION.

DEAR, so long through dusk and light
We have walked life's ways together,
Holding close when sun was bright,
Closer still in cloudy weather.
Blind with use, you hardly know
What it is that binds us so.

Just our clasping hands, my dear,
That cling close to one another—
These have linked us year by year,
And these fetters and none other
Bind us now—for good or ill,
We are joined but by our will.

For our old lives' sake, hold fast!
Tightly clasp, releasing never,
Hold with me our heart-warm past,
Loosed but once, 'tis lost for ever—
Then will rush 'twixt you and me
All the waves of all the sea.

Once divided so, we may
Strive our lives—long, vainly, vainly,
To outface the serge and spray,
Touch, and see each other plainly:
Nothing done can be undone
While the earth spins round the sun.

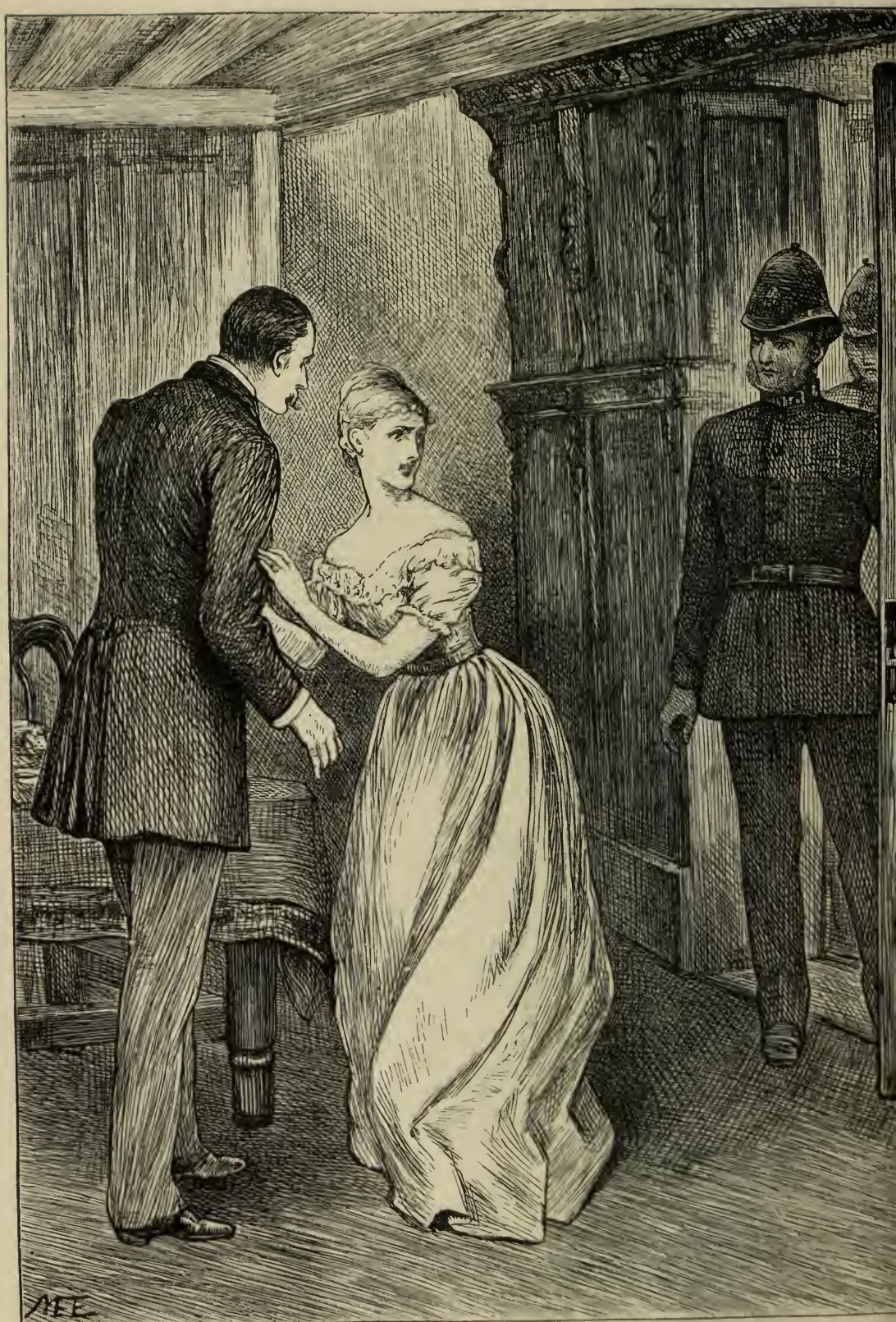
I my arms may open wide,
You may nestle on my breast,
Silent, but unsatisfied,
Unpossessing, unpossessed;
Knowing that between our souls
All this sea of parting rolls.

Then regret will eat our heart,
Till despair devours regret,
And we shall be more apart
Than before we ever met;
Most divided by that past,
When we held each other fast.

We shall sigh—when sighs are vain—
"Oh, lost days that would not linger!"
You will rule your world again,
I shall sing, a soulless singer—
Each look back with longing eyes
On our foregone Paradise.

Paradise—where now we stand,
Once lost, nothing can retrieve it,
Still we hold it, hand in hand,
Must we lose it? Need we leave it?
It is ours, my sweet, to-day;
Shall we go, or shall we stay?

E. NESBIT.



M. ELLEN STAPLES. J. SWAIN.

LADY LEVEL ROSE WITH A STARTLED MOVEMENT, AND SHRANK CLOSE TO MR. RAVENSWORTH, CRYING OUT, AS IF FOR PROTECTION, "ARNOLD! ARNOLD!"

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUSE AT MARSHDALE.

IT was a gloomy day, not far off the gloomy month of November, and it was growing towards mid-day, when a train on a small line, branching from the direct London line, drew up at the somewhat insignificant station of Upper Marshdale. A young and beautiful lady, without attendants, descended from a first-class carriage.

"Any luggage, ma'am?" inquired a porter, stepping up to her.

"A small black bag; nothing else."

The bag was found in the van, and placed on the platform. A family, who also appeared to have arrived at their destination, closed round the van and were tumultuous over a missing trunk, and the lady drew back and accosted a stolid-looking lad, dressed in the railway uniform.

"How far is it to Marshdale?"

"Marshdale! Why, you be at Marshdale," returned the boy, in sulky tones.

"I mean Marshdale House."

"Marshdale House?—That be my Lord Level's place," said the boy, still more sulkily. "It be a matter of two mile."

"Are there any carriages to be hired?"

"There's one; a fly; he waits here when the train comes in."

"Where is it to be found?"

"It stands in the road, yonder. But if ye wants the fly, it's of no use wanting. It have been booked by them folks squabbling over their boxes: they writed here yesterday for it to be ready for 'em."

The more civil porter now came up, and the lady appealed to him. He confirmed the information that there was only this one conveyance to be had, and the family had secured it. Perhaps, he added, the lady might like to wait until they had done with it.

The lady shook her head impatiently, and decided to walk. "Can you come with me to carry my bag and to show me the way?" she asked of the surly boy.

The surly boy, willing or unwilling, had to acquiesce, and they set off to walk. Upon emerging from the station, he came to a stand-still.

"Now, which way d' you mean to go?" began he, facing round upon his companion. "There's the road way, and it's plaguy long; two mile, good; and there's the field way, and it's a sight nearer."

"Is it as good as the road?"

"It's gooder—barring the bull. He runs at everybody. And he tosses 'em, if he can catch 'em."

Not caring to encounter so objectionable an animal, the lady chose the road; and the boy strode on before her, bag in hand. It was downhill all the way. In due time they reached Marshdale House, which lay in a hollow. It was a low, straggling, irregular structure, built of dark red-brick, with wings and gable ends, and must originally have looked more like a comfortable farm-house than a nobleman's seat. But it had been added to at various periods, without any regard to outward appearance or internal regularity. It was exceedingly retired, and a very large garden surrounded the house, encompassed by high walls and dense trees.

The walls were separated by a pair of handsome iron gates, and a small doorway stood beside them. A short, straight avenue, overhung by trees, led to the front entrance of the house. The surly boy, turning himself and his bag round, pushed backwards against the small door, sent it flying, and branched off into a side-path.

"Is not that the front door?" said the lady, trying to arrest him.

"'Tain't no manner of use going to it," replied the imperturbable boy, marching on. "The old gentleman and lady gets out o' the way, and the maids in the kitchen be deaf, I think. Last time I came up here with a parcel, I rung at it till I was tired, and nobody heard."

He went up to a side-door, flung it open, and put down the bag. A neat-looking young woman, with her sleeves turned up, came forward, and stared in silence.

"Is Lord Level within?" inquired the lady.

"My lord's ill in bed," replied the servant: "he cannot be seen or spoken to. What do you want with him, please?"

She seemed a good-tempered, ignorant sort of girl, but nothing more. At that moment someone called to her from an inner room, and she turned away.

"Are there not any upper servants in the house, do you know?" inquired the lady of the boy.

"I doesn't think so. There's the missis."

A tinge came over the lady's face. "The mistress! Who is she?"

"She's Mrs. Ed'ards. An old lady, what comes to church with buckles in her shoes. And there's Mr. ——"

"What is it that you want here?" interrupted the servant girl, advancing again, and addressing the visitor in a not very conciliatory tone.

"I am Lady Level," was the reply, in a ringing, imperious voice. "Call someone to receive me."

It found its way to the girl's alarm. She looked scared, doubting, and finally turned and flew off down a long, dark passage. The boy heard the announcement without its ruffling his equanimity in the least degree.

"That's all, ain't it?" asked he, giving the bag a condescending touch with his foot.

"How much am I to pay you?" inquired Lady Level.

The boy paused. "You bain't obliged to pay nothing."

"What is the chargè?" repeated Lady Level.

"The charge ain't nothing. If folks likes to give anything, it's gived as a gift."

She smiled, and taking out her purse, gave him half-a-crown. He received it with remarkable satisfaction, and then, with an air of great mystery and cunning, slipped it into his boot.

"But, I say, don't you go and tell, over there, as you gived it me," said he, jerking his head in the direction of the railway station. "We are not let take nothing, and there'd be the whole lot of 'em about my ears. You won't tell?"

"No, I will not tell," replied Lady Level, laughing, in spite of her cares and annoyances. And the promising young porter in embryo, giving vent to a shrill whistle, which might have been heard at the two-mile-off station, tore away as fast as his legs would carry him.

The girl came back with a quaint old lady. Her hair was white, her complexion clear and fresh, and her eyes were black and piercing as ever they had been in her youth. She looked in doubt at the visitor, as the servant had done.

"I am told that someone is inquiring for my lord."

"His wife is inquiring for him. I am Lady Level."

Had any doubt been wavering in the old lady's mind, the tones dispelled it. She curtseyed to the ground: the stately, upright old-fashioned curtsey of the days gone by. A look of distress rose to her face.

"Oh, my lady! That I should live to receive my lord's wife in this unprepared, unceremonious manner! He told me you were in foreign parts, beyond seas."

"I returned to England yesterday, and have left my servants in town. What is the matter with Lord Level?"

"That your ladyship should come to such a house as this, all unfurnished and disordered! and——I beg your pardon, my lady! I cannot take you through these passages," she added, curtseying for Lady Level to go out again. "Deborah, go round and open the front door."

Lady Level, in the midst of much lamentation, was conducted to the front entrance, and thence ushered into a long, low, uncarpeted room on the left of the dark hall. It was very bare of furniture; chairs and a large table being all that it contained. "It is of no consequence," said Lady Level; "I have come only to see Lord Level, and may not remain above an hour or two. I cannot tell. You are Mrs. Edwards, I think. I have heard Lord Level mention you."

"My name is Edwards, my lady. I was housekeeper in the late lord's time, and, when a young woman, I had the honour of nursing my lord. Since the late lord's death, I and my brother, Jacob Drewitt, have mostly lived here. He used to be house steward at Marshdale."

Lady Level removed her bonnet and cloak, and threw them on to the table. She looked impatient and restless, as she listened to the account of her husband's accident. He had received an injury to his knee, when out riding, the day after his arrival at Marshdale; fever had set in, deepening at times to slight delirium.

"I should like to see him," said Lady Level. "Will you take me to his chamber?"

Mrs. Edwards marshalled her upstairs. Curious, in-and-out, wide and shallow stairs they were, with long passages and short turnings branching from them. She gently threw open the door of a large, handsome room. On the bed lay Lord Level, his eyes closed.

"He is dozing again, my lady," she whispered. "He is sure to fall to sleep whenever the fever leaves him."

"There is no fire in the room!" exclaimed Lady Level.

"The doctor says there's not to be any, my lady. In the room opposite to this, across the passage, you will find a good one. It is my lord's sitting-room when he is well. And here," noiselessly opening a door facing the foot of the bed, "is another chamber, that can be prepared for your ladyship, if you remain."

The housekeeper left the room as she spoke, scarcely knowing whether she stood on her head or her heels, so completely was she confounded by this arrival of Lady Level's—and nothing wherewith to receive her! Mrs. Edwards had her head and hands full just then.

As Lady Level moved forward, her dress came into contact with a light chair, and moved it. The invalid started, and raised himself on his elbow.

"Why!—who—is it?"

"It is I, Lord Level," she said, advancing to the bed.

He looked strangely amazed and perplexed. He could not believe his own eyes, and stared at her as though he would discover whether she was really before him, or whether he was in a dream.

"Don't you know me?" she asked gently.

"Is it—Blanche?"

"Yes."

"But where have you come from?—what brings you here?" he slowly ejaculated.

"I came down by train to-day. I have come to speak to you."

"You were in Germany. I left you in Germany!"

"I thought I had been there long enough: too long; and I quitted it. Archibald, I could not stay there. Had I done so I should have been ill as you are. I think I should have died."

He said nothing for a few moments, and appeared to be lost in thought. Then he drew her face down to his, and kissed it.

"You ought not to have come over without my permission, Blanche."

"I did not travel alone. Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Ravensworth chanced to put up at the inn on their homeward route, and I took the opportunity to come over with them."

The information evidently did not please Lord Level. His brow contracted.

"You wrote me word that you had had an accident," she continued. "How could I be contented to remain away after that? So I came over: and I went to your rooms in Holles Street ——"

"Why on earth did you go there?" he sharply interrupted. "When I had left them."

"But I did not know you had left them. How was I to know you had come to Marshdale if you never told me so? When I found you had left Holles Street, I went straight to Gloucester Place. Papa has just come home from Jersey."

"You ought to have remained in Germany until I was able to join you," he reiterated, irritably: and Blanche could not avoid seeing that he was growing agitated and feverish. "What's to become of you? Where are you to be?"

"First of all, I want to have an explanation with you," said Blanche. "I came over on purpose to have it; to tell you many things. One is, that I will no longer submit to be treated as a child ——"

"Blanche!" he curtly interrupted.

"Well?"

"You are acting as a child now, and as nothing else. This nonsense that you are talking—I am not in a condition to hear it."

"It is not nonsense," said Blanche.

"It is what I will not listen to. It was the height of folly to come here. All you can do now is to go back to London by the next train."

"Go back where?" she passionately asked. "I have no home in London."

"I daresay Major Carlen will receive you for a week. Before that time I hope to be well enough to come up, and prepare a home for you. Where are Sanders and Timms?"

"I did not bring them down with me. They are at an hotel. Why cannot I stay here?"

"Because I won't have it. There is nothing in the place ready for you, or suited to you."

"If it is suited to you, it's suited to me. I say I will not be treated as a child any longer. I could be quite happy here. There is nothing I should like so much as to explore this old house. I never saw such an array of ghostly passages anywhere."

Something in the words seemed dangerously to excite Lord Level. The fever was visibly increasing.

"I forbid you to explore; I forbid you to remain here," he exclaimed in the deepest agitation. "Do you hear me, Blanche?—you must return by the next train."

"I will not," she replied, quite as obstinate as he. "I will not go hence until I have had an explanation with you. If you are too ill at present, I will wait for it."

He was, indeed, too ill. "Quiet, above all things," the doctor had said when he had paid his early morning visit. But quiet Lord Level had not had; his wife had put an end to that. His talk grew random, his mind wandering, a paroxysm of fever ensued. In terror, Lady Level rang the bell.

Mrs. Edwards answered it. Blanche gazed at her with astonishment, scarcely recognising her. She had put on her gala dress of days long gone by: a short, full, red petticoat, a chintz gown looped above it in festoons, high-heeled shoes, buckles, snow-white stockings with worked "clocks," a mob cap of clear lace, large gold earrings, and black mittens. All this she had assumed out of respect to her new lady.

"Is he out of his mind?" gasped Lady Level, terrified at her lord's words and his restless motions.

"It is the fever, my lady," said Mrs. Edwards. "Dear, dear! And we thought him so much better to-day!"

Close upon that, Dr. Macferraty, the medical man, came in. He was of square-built frame with broad shoulders, very dictatorial and positive considering his years, which did not number more than seven-and-twenty.

"What mischief has been at work here?" he demanded, standing over the bed with Mrs. Edwards. "Who has been with him?"

She explained that Lady Level had arrived and had been talking with his lordship. She—Mrs. Edwards—had begged her ladyship *not* to talk to him: but, well, the young were heedless and did not think of consequences.

"If she has worried him into brain-fever, she will have herself to thank for it," harshly spoke the doctor. And Lady Level, who was in the adjoining room, overheard the words.

"Something has happened to agitate my patient," exclaimed Doctor Macferraty, when, in leaving the room, he encountered Lady Level in the passage, and was introduced to her by Mrs. Edwards.

"I am very sorry," she answered. "We were speaking of family affairs, and Lord Level grew excited."

"Then, madam," said the doctor, "do not speak of family affairs again, whilst he is in this weak condition; or of any other affairs likely to excite him. You must, if you please, put off all such topics until he is better."

"How long will that be?" asked Lady Level.

"I cannot say; it may be a week, or it may be a month. When once these intermittent fevers get into the system, it is difficult to shake them off again."

"It will not go on to—to anything worse?" questioned Lady Level, timidly, recalling what she had just overheard.

"I hope not; but I cannot answer for it. Your ladyship must be good enough to bear in mind that much depends upon his keeping himself tranquil, and upon those around helping to keep him so."

The doctor withdrew as he spoke, telling Mrs. Edwards that he would look in again at night. Lord Level remained very excited throughout the rest of the day; he had a bad night, the fever continuing, and was no better in the morning. Mrs. Edwards had sat up with him.

Lady Level then made up her mind to remain at Marshdale, consulting neither her lord nor anyone else. As Major Carlen had remarked, Blanche was developing a will of her own. Though, indeed, it might not have been right to leave him in his present condition. She sent for Sanders and Timms, the two servants who had attended her from Germany, and for certain luggage belonging to herself. Mrs. Edwards did the best she could with this influx of visitors to a scantily-furnished house. Lady Level occupied the chamber that opened from her husband's; it also opened on to the corridor.

"Madam," said Dr. Macferraty to her, taking the bull by the horns on one of the earliest days, "you must allow me to give you a word of advice. Do not, just at present, enter Lord Level's chamber; wait until he is a little stronger. He has just asked me whether you had gone back to town, and I did not say no. It is evident that your being here troubles him. The house, as it is at present, is not in a condition to receive you, or he appears to think so. Therefore, so long as he is in this precarious state, do not show yourself to him. Let him think you have returned to London."

"Is his mind quite right again?"

"By no means. But he has lucid intervals. I assure your ladyship it is of the very utmost importance that he should be kept tranquil. Otherwise, I will not answer for the consequences."

Lady Level took the advice in all humility. Bitterly though she was feeling upon some scores towards her husband, she did not want him to die; no, nor to have brain-fever. So she kept the door closed between her room and his, and was as quiet as a mouse at all times. And the days began to pass on.

Blanche found them monotonous. She explored the house, but the number of passages, short and long, their angles and their turn-

ings, confused her. She made the acquaintance of the steward, Mr. Drewitt, an elderly gentleman who went about in a plum-coloured suit and a large cambric frill to his shirt. One autumn morning when Blanche had traversed the long corridor, beyond the rooms which she and Lord Level occupied, she turned into another at right angles with it, and came to a door that was partly open. Passing through it, she found herself in a narrow passage that she had not before seen. Deborah, the good-natured housemaid, suddenly came out of one of the rooms opening from it, carrying a brush and dust-pan. Deborah was the only servant kept in the house, so far as Lady Level saw, apart from the cook, who was fat and experienced.

"What a curious old house!" exclaimed Lady Level. "Nothing but dark passages that turn and wind about until you don't know where you are."

"It is that, my lady," answered Deborah. "In the late lord's time the servants took to calling it the maze, it puzzled them so. The name got abroad, and some people call it the maze to this day."

"I don't think I have been in this passage before. Does anyone live or sleep here?" added Lady Level, looking at the household articles Deborah carried.

It was a dark, narrow passage, closed in by a door at each end. The door at the upper end was of oak; heavy, and studded with nails. Four rooms opened from the passage, two on each side.

"All these rooms are occupied by the master and missis," said Deborah, alluding to the steward and his sister. "This is Mrs. Edwards's chamber, my lady," pointing to the one she had just quitted. "That beyond it is Mr. Drewitt's; the opposite room is their sitting-room, and the one beside it is not used."

"Where does that heavy door lead to?" continued Lady Level.

"It leads into the East Wing, my lady," replied Deborah. "I have never entered that wing all the two years I've lived here," continued the gossiping girl. "I am not allowed to do so. The door is kept locked; as well as the door answering to it in the passage below."

"Does no one ever go into it?"

"Why, yes, my lady; Mr. Drewitt does, and spends a good part of his time there. He has a business-room there, in which he keeps his books and papers relating to the estate. Mrs. Edwards is in there too with him most days. And my lord goes in when he is down here."

"Then no one really inhabits that wing?"

"Oh, yes, my lady, John Snow and his wife live in it; he's the head gardener. A many years he has been in the family; and one of the last things the late lord did before he died was to give him that wing to live in. An easy life Snow has of it now; working or not, just as he pleases. When there's any unusual work to be done, our gardener on this side is had in to help with it."

Lady Level did not feel much interested in the wing, or in Snow

the gardener. But it happened that not half-an-hour after this conversation, she chanced to see Mrs. Snow.

Leaning, in her listlessness, out of an open window that was just above the side entrance, to which she had been conducted by the boy on her way from the station, she was noticing how high the wall was that separated the garden of the house from the garden of the East Wing. Lofty trees, closely-planted, also flanked the wall, so that not the slightest glimpse could be had on either side of the other garden. The East Wing, with its grounds, was as completely hidden from view as though it had no existence. While rather wondering at this,—for the East Wing was, after all, a part of the house, and not detached from it—Lady Level saw a woman emerge from a little sheltered doorway in the wall, lock it after her, and come up the path, key in hand. This obscure doorway, and another at the foot of the East Wing garden opening to the road, were apparently the only means of entrance to it. To the latter door, always kept locked, was attached a large bell, which awoke the surrounding echoes whenever tradespeople or other applicants rang at it.

"Is that you, Hannah Snow?" cried the cook, stepping forward to meet the other as she came up the path. "And how are you to-day? Do you want anything?"

Catching the name, Lady Level looked out more closely. She saw a tall, strong, respectable woman of middle age, with a smiling, happy face and laughing hazel eyes. She wore a neat white cap, a clean cotton gown and grey-checked apron.

"Yes, cook," was the answer, given in a merry voice. "I want you to give me a handful of candied peel. I am preparing a batch of cakes for my old man, never supposing I had not all the ingredients at hand, and I find I have no peel. I'm sure I had some; and I tell John he must have stolen it."

"What a shame!" cried the cook, taking the words more literally than they were intended. Mrs. Snow laughed.

"Fact is, I suppose I used the last of it in the bread-and-butter pudding I made last week," said she.

"You are always making cakes for that man o' yours, seems to me, Hannah," grumbled the cook. "We can smell them over here when they're baking, and that's pretty often."

"Seems I am: he's always asking for them," assented Hannah. "He likes to eat one now and then between meals, you see."

"Well, he's a rare one for his inside," retorted the cook, as she went in for the candied peel.

"They seem to do very much as they like here," was the only thought that crossed Lady Level.

On this same day Lord Level, who had grown so much better as to be out of danger, dismissed his doctor. Presenting him with a handsome cheque, he told him that he required no further attendance. Blanche received the news from Mrs. Edwards.

"But is he so well as that?" she asked, in surprise.

"Well, my lady, he is very much better, there's no doubt of that. He will be out of bed to-morrow or the next day, and, if he takes care, will have no relapse," was the housekeeper's answer. "No doubt it might be safer for the doctor to continue to come a little longer, if it were only to enjoin strict quiet; but you see my lord does not like him."

"I fancied he did not."

"He is not our own doctor, as perhaps your ladyship has heard," pursued Mrs. Edwards. "*He* is a Mr. Hill: a clever, pleasant man, of a certain age, who was very intimate with the late lord. They were close friends, I may say. When his lordship met with this accident, it put him out uncommonly that we had to send for the young man, Dr. Macferraty, Mr. Hill being away."

"If Lord Level is so well as to do without a doctor, I might go into his room. Don't you think so, Mrs. Edwards?"

"Better not for a day or two, my lady; better not, indeed. I'm afraid my lord will be angry at your having stayed here—there being no fitting establishment or accommodation for your ladyship; and ——"

"That is such nonsense!" interrupted Lady Level. "With Sanders and Timms here, I am more attended to than is really necessary. And even if I had to put up with discomfort for a short time, I daresay I should survive it."

"And it might cause his lordship excitement, I was about to say," quickly continued Mrs. Edwards. "A very little thing would bring the fever back again."

Blanche sighed rebelliously, but recognised the obligation to condemn herself a little longer to this dreary existence.

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUARREL.

THE following day was charmingly fine: the sun brilliant, the air warm as summer. In the afternoon Lady Level went out to take a walk. Lord Level was not up that day, but would be, all being well, on the morrow. It was the injury to the knee more than his general health that was keeping him in bed now.

Outside the gate Blanche looked about her, and decided to take the way towards the railway station. Upper Marshdale lay close beyond it, and she thought she would see what the little town was like. If she felt tired after exploring it, she could engage the solitary railway fly to bring her home again.

She went along the deserted road, passing a peasant's cottage now and then. Very near to the station she met the surly boy. He was

coming along with a leap and a whistle, and stopped dead at sight of Lady Level.

"I say," said he, in a low tone, all his glee and his impudence gone out of him, "be you going *there?*"

"Yes," answered Lady Level, half smiling, for the boy amused her. He had pointed to indicate the station, but so awkwardly that she thought he pointed to the roofs and chimneys beyond it. "Yes, I am. Why?"

His face fell. "Not to tell of *me?*" he gasped.

"To tell of you! What should I have to tell of you?"

"About that there half-crown. You *give* him to me, mind; I never asked. You can't see the station-master if you try: he's a gone to his tea."

"Oh, I won't tell of that," said Lady Level. "I am going to the village, not to the station."

"They'd make such a row," said the boy, somewhat relieved. "The porter'd be mad that it wasn't given to him; he might get me sent away perhaps for't. It's such a lot, you see: a whole half-crown: when anything is given, it's a sixpence. But 'tain't nothing that's given mostly; *nothing*."

The intense resentment thrown into the last word made Lady Level laugh.

"It's a sight o' time, weeks and weeks, since I've had anything given me afore, barring the three penny pieces from Mr. Snow," went on the grumbling boy. "And what's three penny pieces?"

"Mr. Snow?" repeated Lady Level. "Who is he?"

"He is Lord Level's head gardener, he be. He comes up here to the station one day, not long afore you come down; and he collars the fly for the next down train. The next down train comes in and brings my lord and a lady with him. Mr. Snow, he puts the lady inside, and he puts what luggage there were outside. 'Twasn't much, and I helps him, and he dives into his pockets and brings out three penny pieces. And I'll swear that for weeks afore nobody had never given me a single farthing."

Lady Level changed colour. "What's your name?" she suddenly asked the boy, to cover her confusion.

"It be Sam Doughty. That there lady ——"

"Oh, I know the lady," she carelessly interrupted, hating herself at the same time for pursuing the subject and the questions. "A lady with black hair and eyes, was it not, and long gold earrings?"

"Well, it were. I noticed the earrings, d'ye see, the sun made 'em sparkle so. Handsome earrings they was, as handsome as she were."

"And Lord Level took her home with him in the fly, did he?"

"That he didn't. She went along of herself, Mr. Snow a-riding on the box. My lord walked across the fields. The station-master telled him to mind the bull, but my lord called back that he warn't afraid.'

There was nothing more to ask; nothing more that she could ask. But Lady Level had heard enough to disturb her equanimity, and she turned without going on to Upper Marshdale. That the lady with the gold earrings was either in the house, or in its East Wing, and that that was why she was wanted out of it, seemed clearer to her than the sun at noonday.

That same evening, Lady Level's servants were at supper in the large kitchen: where, as no establishment was kept up in the house, they condescended to take their meals. Deborah was partly waiting on them, partly gossiping, and partly dressing veal cutlets and bacon in the Dutch oven for what she called the upstairs supper. The cook had gone to bed early with a violent toothache.

"You have enough there, I hope," cried Timms, as Deborah brought the Dutch oven to the table to turn the cutlets.

"Old Mr. Drewitt has such an appetite; leastways at his supper," answered Deborah.

"I wonder they don't take their meals below; it's a long way to carry them, up all them stairs," remarked Mr. Sanders, when Deborah was placing her dish of cutlets on the tray prepared for it.

"Oh, I don't mind it; I'm used to it now," said the good-humoured girl, as she went off with a quick step.

Deborah returned with a quieter step than she had departed. "They are quarrelling like anything," she exclaimed in a low, frightened voice. "She's gone into my lord's room, and they are having it out over something or other."

Timms, who was then engaged in eating some favourite custard pudding, looked up. "What? Who? Do you mean my lord and my lady? How do you know, Deborah?"

"I heard them wrangling as I went by. I have to pass their rooms, you know, to get to Mr. Drewitt's rooms, and I heard them still louder as I came back. They are quarrelling just like common people. Has she a temper?"

"No," said Timms. "He has though; that is, he can be frightfully passionate at times."

"He is not thought so in this house," returned Deborah. "To hear my master and mistress talk, my lord is just an angel upon earth."

"Ah!" said Timms, sniffing significantly.

Her supper ended, but not her curiosity, Timms stole a part of the way upstairs, and listened. But she only came in for the end of the dispute, as she related to Mr. Sanders on her return. Lady Level, after some final speech of bitter reproach, passed into her room and shut the door with a force that shook the walls, and probably shook Lord Level, who relieved his wrath by a little delicate language. So much Timms heard; but of what the quarrel had been about, she did not gather the faintest glimmer.

The house went to rest. Silence, probably sleep, had reigned within it for some two hours, and the clock had struck one, when wild calls of alarm, coupled with the ringing of his bell, issued from Lord Level's chamber. The servants rose hastily, in terror. Those cries of fear came not from their lord, but from Lady Level.

Sanders, partly attired, hastened thither; Timms, in a huge shawl, opened her door and stopped him; Deborah came flying down the long corridor. Mrs. Edwards was already in Lord Level's chamber. Lady Level, in a blue silk wrapping-gown, her cries of alarm over, lay panting in a chair, extremely agitated; and Lord Level was in a fainting-fit on his bed, with a stab in his arm, and another in his side, from which blood was flowing.

Some hours later, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Ravensworth were at breakfast in Portland Place, when Major Carlen entered without ceremony. His purple-and-scarlet cloak, without which he rarely stirred out, had come unfastened and trailed behind him; his face looked scared and crestfallen.

"I must see you, I must see you," cried the Major, throwing up his hands, as if apologising for the intrusion. "It's on a matter of life and death."

"We have finished breakfast," said Mrs. Ravensworth; and she rose and left them together.

The Major strode up to Arnold, his teeth actually chattering. "I told you what it would be," he muttered. "I warned you of the consequences, if you helped Blanche to go down there. She has attempted his life."

Mr. Ravensworth gazed at him inquiringly.

"By George, she has! They had a blow-up last night, it seems, and she has stabbed him. It can be no one else who has done it. When these delicate girls are put up; made jealous, and that sort of thing; they are as bad as their more furious sisters. Witness that character of Scott's—what's her name?—Lucy, in the Bride of Lam——"

"For pity's sake, Major Carlen, what are you saying?" interrupted Mr. Ravensworth, scarcely knowing whether the Major was mad or sane, or had been taking dinner in place of breakfast. "Don't introduce trashy romance into the woes of real life! Has anything happened at Lord Level's, or has it not?"

"He is stabbed, I tell you. One of Lord Level's servants, Sanders, arrived before I was up, with a note from Blanche. Here, read it!" But the Major's hand and the note shook together as he held it out.

"Do, dear papa, hasten down! A shocking event has happened to Lord Level. He has been stabbed in bed. I am terrified out of my senses. "BLANCHE LEVEL."

"Now, she has done it," whispered the Major again, his stony eyes turned on Mr. Ravensworth in dread. "As sure as that her name's Blanche Level, it is she who has done it!"

"Nonsense! Impossible. Have you learnt any of the details?"

"A few scraps. As much as the man knew. He says they were awakened by cries in the middle of the night, and found Lord Level had been stabbed; and her ladyship was with him, screaming, and fainting on a chair. 'Who did it, Sanders?' said I. 'It's impossible to make out who did it, sir,' said he; 'there was no one indoors to do it, and all the house was in bed.' 'What do the police say?' I asked. 'The police are not called in, sir,' returned he; 'my lord and my lady won't have it done.' Now, Ravensworth, what can be clearer proof than that? I used to think her mother had a tendency to insanity; I did, by Jove; she went once or twice into such a tantrum with me. Though she had a soft, sweet temper in general, mild as milk."

"Well, you must go down without delay."

The grim old fellow put up his hands, which were trembling visibly. "I wouldn't go down if you gave me a hundred pounds a mile, poor as I am, just now. Look what a state I'm in, as it is: I had to get Sanders to hook my cloak for me, and he didn't half do it. I wouldn't interfere between Blanche and Level for a gold-mine. You must go down for me; I came to ask you to do so."

"It is impossible for me to go down to-day. I wish I knew more. How did you hear there had been any disagreement between them?"

"Sanders let it out. He said the women-servants heard Level and his wife hotly disputing."

"Where is Sanders?"

"In your hall. I brought him round with me."

The man was called in, and was desired to repeat what he knew of the affair. It was not much, and it has been already stated.

"Someone must have got in, Sanders," observed Mr. Ravensworth, when he had listened.

"Well, sir, I don't know," was the answer. "The curious thing is that there are no signs of it. All the doors and windows had been fastened before we went to bed, and they had not been, so far as we can discover, in the least disturbed."

"Do you suspect anyone in the house?"

"Why—no, sir; there's no one we like to suspect," returned Sanders, coughing dubiously.

"The servants ——"

"Oh, none of the servants would do such a thing," interrupted Sanders, very decidedly: and Mr. Ravensworth feared they might be getting upon dangerous ground. He caught Major Carlen's significant glance. It said, as plainly as glance ever yet spoke, "The man suspects his mistress."

"Is Lord Level's bedroom isolated from the rest of the rooms?

"Pretty well, sir, for that. No one sleeps near him but my lady. Her room opens from his."

"Could he have done it himself, Sanders?" struck in Major Carlen. "He has been light-headed from fever."

"Just at the first moment the same question occurred to me, sir; but we soon saw that it was not at all likely. The fever had abated, my lord was quite collected, and the stab in the arm could not have been done by himself."

"Was any instrument found?"

"Yes, sir: a clasp-knife with a small, sharp blade. It was found on the floor of my lady's room."

An ominous silence ensued.

"Are the stabs dangerous?" inquired Mr. Ravensworth.

"It is thought they are only slight, sir. The danger will be if they bring back the fever. His lordship will not have a doctor called in ——"

"Not have a doctor called in!"

"He forbids it absolutely, sir. When we reached his room, in answer to my lady's cries, he had fainted; but he soon recovered, and hearing Mr. Edwards speak of the doctor, he refused to have him sent for."

"You ought to have sent, all the same," imperiously spoke Mr. Ravensworth.

Sanders smiled. "Ah, sir, but my lord's will is law."

Mr. Ravensworth turned to a side-table. He wrote a rapid word to Lady Level, promising to be with her that evening, gave it to Sanders, and bade him make the best of his way back to Marshdale. Certain business of importance was detaining him in town for the day.

"When you get down there, Ravensworth, you won't say that I wouldn't go, you know," said the Major. "Say I couldn't."

"What excuse can I make for you?"

"Any excuse that comes uppermost. Say I'm in bed with gout. I have charged Sanders to hold his tongue."

The day had quite passed before Mr. Ravensworth was able to start on his journey. It was dark when he reached Upper Marshdale. There he found Sanders and the solitary fly.

"Is Lord Level better?" was his first question.

"A little better this evening, sir, I believe; but he has again been off his head with fever, and Dr. Macferraty had, after all, to be called in," replied the man. "My lady is pretty nearly beside herself too."

"Have the police been called in yet?"

"No, sir; no chance of it; my lord and my lady won't have it done."

"It appears to be an old-fashioned place, Sanders," remarked Mr. Ravensworth, when they had reached the house.

"It's the most awkward turn-about place inside, sir, you ever saw;

nothing but passages. But my lord never lives here; he only pays it promiscuous visits now and then, and brings down no servants with him. He was kept prisoner here, as may be said, through jamming his knee in a gateway; and then my lady came down, and we are putting up with all sorts of inconveniences."

"Who lives here in general?"

"Two old retainers of the Level family, sir: both of 'em sights to look upon; she especially. She dresses up like an old picture."

Waiting within the doorway to receive Mr. Ravensworth was Mrs. Edwards. He could not take his eyes from her: he had never seen one like her in real life, and Sanders's words, "dresses up like an old picture," recurred to him. He had thought this style of dress completely gone out of date, *except* in pictures; and here it was before him, worn by a living woman! She dropped him a stately curtsey, that would have served for the prelude to a court minuet in the palmy days of Queen Charlotte.

"Sir, you are the gentleman expected by my lady?"

"Yes. Mr. Ravensworth."

"I'll show you in myself, sir."

Taking up a candle from a marble slab—there was no other light to be seen—she conducted him through the passage, and, turning down another which stood at right angles with it, halted at the door of a room. In answer to a question from Mr. Ravensworth, she said his lordship was much better within the last hour; quite himself again. "What would you be pleased to take, sir?" she added. "I will order it brought in to you."

"I require nothing, thank you."

But quite a housekeeper of the old school, and essentially hospitable, she would not take a refusal. "I hope you will, sir: tea—or coffee—or supper ——?"

"A little coffee, then."

She dropped another of her ceremonious curtseys, and threw open the door. "The gentleman you expected, my lady."

It was another long, bare room, but not the one already mentioned. Singularly bare and empty it looked to-night. A large fire burned in the grate, half way down the room, and in an easy-chair before it reclined Lady Level—asleep. Two wax-candles stood on the high carved mantelpiece, and the large oak table behind Lady Level was dark with age. Everything about the room was dreary, excepting the fire, the lights, and the sleeper.

Should he awaken her? He looked at Blanche Level and deliberated. Her feet rested on a footstool, and her head lay on the low back of the chair, a cushion under it. She wore an evening dress of light silk, trimmed with white lace. Her neck and arms, only relieved by the lace, looked cold and bare in the dreary room, for she wore no ornaments; nothing of gold or silver was about her—except her wedding-ring. Was it possible that she had attempted the life of him

who had put on that ring? There was a careworn look on her face as she slept, which lessened her beauty, and two indented lines rose in her forehead, not usual to a girl of twenty; her mouth, slightly open, showed her teeth; and very pretty teeth were Lady Level's. No, thought Mr. Ravensworth, guilty of that crime she never had been!

Should he arouse her? A coal fell on to the hearth with a rattle, and settled the question, for Lady Level opened her eyes. A moment's dreamy unconsciousness, and then she started up, her face flushing.

"Oh, Arnold, I beg your pardon! I must have dropped asleep. How good of you to come!"

With a burst of tears she held out her hands; it seemed so glad a relief to have a friend there.

"Arnold, I am so miserable——so frightened! Why did not papa come down this morning?"

"He was ——" Mr. Ravensworth searched for an excuse and did not find one easily. "Something kept him in town, and he requested me to come down in his stead, and see if I could be of any use to you."

"Have you heard much about it?" she asked, in a whisper.

"Sanders told me and your father what little he knew. But it appeared most extraordinary to both of us. Sit down, Lady Level,' he continued, drawing a chair nearer to hers. "You look ill and fatigued."

"I am not ill; unless uncertainty and anxiety can be called illness. Have you dined?"

"Yes; but your housekeeper insists on hospitality, and will send me up some coffee."

"Did you ever see so complete a picture as she is? Just like those engravings we admire in the old frames."

"Will you describe to me this—the details of the business I came down to hear?"

"I am trying to delay it," she said, with a forced laugh—a laugh that caused Mr. Ravensworth involuntarily to knit his brow, for it spoke of insincerity. "I think I will not tell you anything about it until to-morrow morning."

"I must leave again to-night. The last up-train passes ——"

"Oh, but you will stay all night," she interrupted, nervously. "I cannot be left alone. Mrs. Edwards is preparing a room for you somewhere."

"Well, we will discuss that by-and-by. What is this unpleasant business about Lord Level?"

"I don't know what it is," she replied. "He has been attacked and stabbed. I only know that it nearly frightened me to death."

"By whom was it done?"

"I don't know," she repeated. "They say the doors and windows were all fastened, and that no one could have got in."

Now, strange as it may appear, and firmly impressed as Mr.

Ravensworth was with the innocence of Lady Level, there was a tone in her voice, a look in her countenance, as she spoke the last few sentences, that he did not like. Her manner was evasive, and she did not meet his glance openly.

"Were you in his room when it happened?"

"Oh, dear, no. Since I came down here I have occupied a room next to his; his dressing-room, I believe, when he stays here at ordinary times; and I was in bed and asleep at the time."

"Asleep?"

"Fast asleep. Until something woke me: and when I entered Lord Level's room, I found—I found—what had happened."

"Had it just happened?"

"Just. I was terrified. After I had called the servants, I think I nearly fainted. Lord Level quite fainted."

"But did you not see anyone in the room who could have attacked him?"

She shook her head.

"Nor hear any noise?"

"I—thought I heard a noise; I am positive I thought so. And I heard Lord Level's voice."

"That you naturally would hear. A man whose life is being attempted would not be likely to remain silent. But you must try and give me a better explanation than this. "You say something suddenly awoke you. What was it?"

"I cannot tell you," repeated Lady Level.

"Was it a noise?"

"N—o; not exactly. I cannot say precisely what it was."

Mr. Ravensworth deliberated before he spoke again. "My dear Lady Level, this will not do. If these questions are painful to you, if you prefer not to trust me, they shall cease, and I will return to town as wise as I came, without having been able to afford you any assistance or advice. I think you could tell me more, if you would do so."

Lady Level burst into tears and grew agitated. A disagreeable doubt—guilty or not guilty?—stole over Mr. Ravensworth. "Oh, heaven, that it should be so!" he cried to himself, recalling how good and gentle she had been through her innocent girlhood. "I came down, hoping to be to you a true friend," he resumed in a low tone. "If you will allow me to be so, if you will confide in me—Blanche, come what may, I will stand by you."

There was a long silence. Mr. Ravensworth did not choose to break it. He had said his say, and the rest remained with Lady Level.

"Lord Level has made me very angry indeed," she broke out, indignation arresting her tears. "He has made me—almost—hate him."

"But you are not telling me what occurred."

"I have told you," she answered. "I was suddenly aroused from sleep, and then I heard Lord Level's voice, calling 'Blanche! Blanche!' I went into his room, ran up to him, and he put out his arms and caught me to him. Then I saw blood upon his night-shirt, and he told me he had been stabbed. Oh, how I shuddered! I cannot think of it now without feeling sick and ill, without almost fainting," she added, a shiver running through her frame.

Mr. Ravensworth's opinion veered round again. "She do it—nonsense!" Lady Level continued.

"'Don't scream; don't scream, Blanche,' he said. 'I am not much hurt, and I will take care of you,' and he held me to him as though I were in a vice. I thought he did not want me to alarm the house."

"Did he keep you there long?"

"It seemed long to me: I don't suppose it was more than a couple of minutes. His hold gradually relaxed, and then I saw that he had fainted. Oh, the terror of that moment! all the more intense that it had been suppressed. I feared he might bleed to death. I opened the door, and cried and screamed, and called for the servants; I rushed back to the room and rang the bell: and then I fell back in the easy chair, and could do no more."

"Well, this is a better explanation than you gave me at first," said Mr. Ravensworth, encouragingly: and she had spoken more readily, without appearance of disguise. "Then it was Lord Level's calling to you that first aroused you?"

"No; oh, no; it was not that. It ——" she stopped in confusion. "At least—perhaps it was. It—I can't say." She had relapsed into evasion again, and once more Mr. Ravensworth was plunged in doubt. He leaned towards her.

"I am going to ask you a question, Lady Level, and you must of course answer it, or not, as you please. I can only repeat that any confidence you repose in me shall never be betrayed. Did Lord Level inflict this injury on himself?"

"No, that was impossible," she freely answered; "it must have been done for him."

"The weapon, I hear, was found in your room."

"Yes."

"But how could it have come there?"

"As if I knew!"

"Why do you object to the police being called in?"

"It was Lord Level who objected. When he recovered from his faintness, and heard them speaking of the police, he called Mr. Drewitt to him—who is master of the house under Lord Level—and charged him that nothing of the kind should be done. I would rather they were here," she added after a pause. "I should feel safer. This morning I went to my husband and told him if he would not have in the police, the house searched, and the facts investigated,

I should die with terror. He replied, jestingly, then if I chose to be so foolish, I must die: the hurt was his, not mine, and if he saw no occasion for having in the police, and did not choose to have them in, surely I need not want them. I was perfectly safe and so was he, he continued, and he would see that I was kept so. He would not even have the doctor called in at first; but towards mid-day, when the fever returned and he became delirious, Mr. Drewitt sent for him."

"That seems more strange than all—refusing to have a doctor. He ——"

The arrival of coffee interrupted them. Sanders brought it in in a silver coffee-pot on a silver tray, with biscuits and other light refreshments; and Mrs. Edwards attended to pour it out. Mr. Ravensworth repeated to her what he had just said about the doctor.

"The fact is, sir, my lord does not like Dr. Macferraty," she rejoined. "None of us in this house do like him; we cannot endure him. He has not long been in practice, and we look upon him as an upstart. It is a great misfortune that Mr. Hill is away just now."

"The usual attendant, I presume, Mrs. Edwards?"

"Yes, sir; and a friend besides. He and the late lord seemed almost like brothers, so intimate were they. Mr. Hill's mother is going on for ninety; she is beginning to break, and he has gone over to see her. She lives in the Isle of Man. It is almost a month since he went away."

"The late lord? Let me see. He was the present lord's uncle, was he not?"

"Why, no, sir; he was his father," returned Mrs. Edwards, surprised at the mistake. "The late peer, Archibald Lord Level, had two sons, Mr. Francis the heir, and Mr. Archibald. Mr. Francis died of consumption, and lies buried in the family vault in Marshdale Church; and Mr. Archibald, the only son left, succeeded to his father."

"Yes, yes, I had forgotten," said Mr. Ravensworth. "An idea was floating in my mind that the present peer had not been always the heir-apparent."

CHAPTER XII

MYSTERY.

Silence had fallen upon the room. Coffee had been taken, and the tray carried away by Mrs. Edwards. It was yet only eight o'clock. Mr. Ravensworth sat in mental perplexity, believing he had not come to the bottom of this dreadful affair; no, nor half way to it.

But Lady Level was in still greater perplexity, her mind buried in miserable reverie. A conviction that she was being frightfully wronged in some way, and that she would not bear it, lay uppermost with her. Since meeting with the railway boy, Sam Doughty, the previous after-

noon, and hearing the curious information he had disclosed, her temper had been gradually rising. It was temper that had caused her to declare herself to Lord Level while the servants (as related in a former chapter) were at supper in the kitchen, and Mrs. Edwards and the old steward were shut up in their sitting-room, waiting for their own supper to be served. The coast thus clear, in went Blanche to her lord's chamber. Not to open out the budget of her wrongs: he might not be sufficiently well for that: but to announce herself. To let him see that she was still in the house, that she had disregarded his injunction to quit it; and to assure him, in her rebellious spirit, that she meant to remain in it as long as she pleased. Not a word of suspected and unorthodox matters did Lady Level breathe, and the quarrel that arose between them was wholly on the score of her disobedience. Lord Level was passionately angry, thus to have been set at naught. He told her that as his wife she owed him obedience, and must give it to him. She retorted that she would not do so. The dispute went no further than that; but loud and angry words passed on both sides. And the next episode in the drama, some three or four hours later, was the mysterious attack upon Lord Level.

"Arnold," suddenly spoke her ladyship, looking up from her chair: "I mean to take a very decisive step."

"In what way?" he quietly asked, from his seat on the other side the fireplace. "To send for the police?"

"No, no, no; not that. I shall separate from Lord Level."

"Oh," said Mr. Ravensworth, taken by surprise, and thinking she was jesting.

"As soon as he is well again, and able to discuss matters, I shall demand a separation. I shall *insist* upon it. If he will not accord it to me privately, I shall apply for it publicly."

"Blanche, you will do no such thing," he exclaimed, rising in excitement. "You do not know what you are saying."

"And you do not know how much cause I have for saying it," she answered. "Lord Level has—has—insulted me."

"Hush," said Mr. Ravensworth. "I don't quite know what you mean by insult ——"

"And I cannot tell you," she interrupted, her pretty black satin slipper beating its indignation on the hearthrug, her cheeks wearing a delicate rose-flush. "It is a thing I can speak of only to himself."

"But—I was going to say—Lord Level does not, I feel sure, intrude personal insult upon you. Anything that may take place outside your knowledge you had better neither notice nor inquire into."

Lady Level shook her head defiantly. "I mean to do it."

"I will not hear another word upon this point," said Mr. Ravensworth, sternly. "You are as yet not much more than a child, young lady; when you are a little older and wiser, you will see how foolish

such ideas are. For your own sake, Blanche, put them away from you."

"I wish my dear brother Tom were here!" she petulantly returned. "It was a shame his regiment should be sent out to India!"

Mr. Ravensworth drew in his stern lips. He had suspected that of the dreadful fate of Tom Heriot she must still be ignorant. The suspicion was now confirmed.

At that moment the steward, Mr. Drewitt, appeared; and Lady Level introduced him by name. Mr. Ravensworth saw a pale, venerable man of sixty years, still strong and upright, looking like a gentleman of the old, old school, in his plum-coloured suit and white silk stockings, his silver knee-buckles, his low shoes, and his voluminous cambric shirt-frill. He brought a message from his lord, who wished to see Mr. Ravensworth.

"Who told his lordship that Mr. Ravensworth was here?" exclaimed Lady Level, quickly.

"Madam, it was I. My lord heard someone being shown into your ladyship, and inquired who had come. I am sorry he has asked for you, sir," candidly added the steward, as they left the room together. "The fever has abated, but the least excitement will bring it on again."

Lady Level was sorry also. She did not care that Mr. Ravensworth's presence in the house should be known upstairs. The fact was that one day when she and her husband were on their homeward journey from Savoy, and Blanche was indulging in odds and ends of grievances against her lord, as in her ill-feeling towards him she was then taking to do, she had spoken a few words in sheer perverseness of spirit to make him jealous of Arnold Ravensworth. Lord Level said nothing, but he took the words to heart. He had not liked that gentleman before; he hated him now. Blanche blushed for herself as she recalled it.

Of course, it was not the visitor likely to give most pleasure to Lord Level. As the steward introduced Mr. Ravensworth and left them together, Lord Level regarded him with a cold, stern glance.

"So it is you!" he exclaimed. May I ask what brings you down here? Did my lady send for you?"

"No," answered Mr. Ravensworth, advancing towards the bed. "Major Carlen called at my house this morning and requested me to come down. I could not reach Marshdale before to-night."

"Major Carlen? Oh! very good. Major Carlen dare not interfere between me and my wife; and he knows that."

"So far as I believe, Major Carlen has no intention, or wish, to interfere. Lady Level sent to him, in her alarm, and he requested me to come down in his place."

"If Major Carlen has entered into an arrangement with you to come to my house and pry into matters that concern myself alone ——"

"I beg your lordship's pardon," was the curt interruption. "I do

not like or respect Major Carlen sufficiently well to enter into any 'arrangement' with him. I came down here, certainly in compliance with his desire, but in a spirit of kindness towards Lady Level, and to be of assistance to yourself if it were possible."

"How came you to bring Lady Level over from Germany?"

"She wished to come over."

"And I wished and desired her to stay there until I could join her. Do you call *that* interference?"

"It was nothing of the kind. On the morning of our departure from the inn, Lady Level told my wife and myself that she should take the opportunity to travel with us. She and her servants were even then dressed for the journey, and her travelling-carriage stood ready packed in the yard. If she did this against your wish, I am in no way responsible for it. It was not my place to dictate to her; to say she should go, or should remain. Be assured, my lord, I am the last man in the world unduly to interfere with other people; and my coming down now was entirely brought about by Major Carlen."

Lord Level was not insensible to reason. He remained silent for a time, the angry expression gradually leaving his face. Mr. Ravensworth spoke.

"I hope this injury to your lordship will not prove a grave one."

"It is a trifle," was the answer; "nothing but a trifle. It is my knee that keeps me prostrate here more than anything else; and I have intermittent fever with it."

"Can I be of service to you? If so, command me."

"Much obliged. No, I do not want anyone to be of service to me, if you allude to this stabbing business. Some drunken fellow got in, and ——"

"The servants say the doors were all left fastened, and were so found."

"The servants say so to conceal their carelessness," cried Lord Level, as a contortion of pain crossed his face. "This knee gives me twinges at times like a red-hot iron."

"If anyone had broken in, especially any ——"

"Mr. Ravensworth," imperatively interrupted Lord Level, "it is my pleasure that this affair should not be investigated. I say that some man got in—a poacher, probably, who must have been the worse for drink—and he attacked me, not knowing what he was doing. To have a commotion made over it would only excite me, in my present feverish condition. Therefore I shall put up with the injury, and shall be well all the sooner for doing so. You will be so obliging," he added, some sarcasm in his tone, "as to do the same."

But now, Mr. Ravensworth did not show himself wise in that moment. He urged, in all good faith, a different course upon his lordship. The presumption angered and excited Lord Level. In no time, as it seemed, and without sufficient cause, the fever returned and mounted to the brain. His face grew crimson, his eye wild; his

voice rose almost to a scream, and he flung his uninjured arm about the bed. Mr. Ravensworth, in self-reproach for what he had done, looked for the bell and rang it.

"Drewitt, are the doors fastened?" raved his lordship in delirium, as the steward hastened in. "Do you hear me, Drewitt? Have you looked to the doors? You must have left one of them open! Where are the keys? The keys, I say, Drewitt!—— What brings that man here?"

"You had better go down, sir, out of his sight," whispered the steward, for it was at Mr. Ravensworth the invalid was excitedly pointing. "I knew what it would be if he began talking. And he was so much better!"

"His lordship excites himself for nothing," was the deprecating answer.

"Why, of course," said Mr. Drewitt. "It is the nature of fever-patients to do so."

Mrs. Edwards came in with appliances to cool the heated head, and Mr. Ravensworth returned to the sitting-room below. Blanche was not there. Close upon that, Dr. Macferraty called. After he had been with his patient and dressed the wounds, he came bustling into the sitting-room. This loud young man had a nose that turned straight up, giving an impudent look to the face, and wide-open, round green eyes. But, no doubt, he had his good points, and was a skilful surgeon.

"You are a friend of the family, I hear, sir," he began. "I hope you intend to order an investigation into this extraordinary affair?"

"I have no authority for doing so. And Lord Level does not wish it done."

"A fig for Lord Level! He does not know what he's saying," cried Dr. Macferraty. "There never was so monstrous a thing heard of, as that a nobleman should be stabbed in his own bed, and the assassin be let off, scot-free! We need not look far for the culprit!"

The last words, significantly spoken, jarred on Mr. Ravensworth's ears. "Have you a suspicion?" he asked.

"I can put two and two together, sir, and find they make four. The windows were fast; the doors were fast; there was no noise, no disturbance, no robbery: well, then, what deduction have we to fall back upon but that the villain, he or she, is an inmate of the house?"

Mr. Ravensworth's pulses beat a shade more quickly. "Do you suspect one of the servants?"

"Yes, I do."

"But the servants are faithful and respectable. They are not suspected indoors, I assure you."

"Perhaps not; they are out-of-doors, though. The whole neighbourhood is in commotion over it; and how Drewitt and the old lady can let these two London servants be at large is the talk of the place."

"Oh, it is the London servants you suspect, then, or one of them?"

"Look here," said Dr. Macferraty, dropping his voice and bending forward in his chair till his face almost touched Mr. Ravensworth's: "that the deed was done by an inmate of the house is *certain*. No one got in, or could have got in; it is nonsense to suggest it. The inmates consist of Lady Level and the servants only. If you take it from the servants, you must lay it upon her."

No answer.

"Well," went on the doctor, "it is impossible to suspect *her*. A delicate, refined girl, as she is, could not do so evil a thing. So we must needs look to the servants. Deborah would not do it; the stout old cook could not. She was in bed ill, besides, and slept through all the noise and confusion. The two other servants, Sanders and Timms, are strangers."

"I feel sure they no more did it than I," impulsively spoke Mr. Ravensworth.

"Then you would fall back upon Lady Level?"

"No. No," flashed Mr. Ravensworth. "The bare suggestion of the idea is an insult to her."

Doctor Macferraty drew himself back in his chair. "There's a mystery in the affair, look at it which way you will, sir," he cried, raspingly. "My lord says he did not recognise the assassin; but, if he did not, why should he forbid investigation? Put it as you do, that the two servants are innocent—why, then, I fairly own I am puzzled. Another thing puzzles me: the knife was found in Lady Level's chamber, yet she protests that she slept through it all—was only awakened by his lordship calling to her when it was over."

"It may have been flung in."

"No; it was carried in; for blood had dripped from it all along the floor."

"Has the weapon been recognised?"

"Not that I am aware of. No one owns to knowing it. Anyway, it is an affair that ought to be, and that must be, inquired into officially," concluded the doctor from the corridor, as he said good-night and went bustling out.

Mr. Ravensworth, standing at the sitting-room door, saw him meet the steward, who must have overheard the words, and now advanced with cautious steps. Touching Mr. Ravensworth's arm, he drew him within the shadow cast by a remote corner.

"Sir," he whispered, "my lady told Mrs. Edwards that you were a firm friend of hers; a sure friend?"

"I trust I am, Mr. Drewitt."

"Then let it drop, sir; it is no common robber who has done this. Let it drop, for her sake and my lord's."

Mr. Ravensworth felt painfully perplexed. Those few words, spoken by the faithful old steward, were more fraught with suspicion against Lady Level than anything he had yet heard.

Returning to the sitting-room, pacing it to and fro in his perplexity for he knew not how long, he was looking at his watch to ascertain the time, when Lady Level came in. She had been in Lord Level's sitting-room upstairs, she said, the one opposite his bed-chamber. He was somewhat calmer now. Mr. Ravensworth thought that he must now be going.

"I have been of no assistance to you, Lady Level; I do not see that I can be of any," he observed. "But should anything arise in which you think I can help you, send for me."

"What do you expect to arise?" she hastily inquired.

"Nay, I expect nothing."

"Did Lord ——" Lady Level suddenly stopped and turned her head. Just within the room stood two policemen. She rose with a startled movement, and shrank close to Mr. Ravensworth, crying out, as if for protection. "Arnold! Arnold!"

"Do not agitate yourself," he whispered. "What is it that you want?" he demanded, moving towards the men.

"We have come about this attack on Lord Level, sir," replied one of them.

"Who sent for you?"

"Don't know anything about that, sir. Our Superior ordered us here, and is coming on himself. We must examine the fastenings of this window, sir, by the lady's leave."

They passed up the room, and Lady Level left it, followed by Mr. Ravensworth. Outside stood Deborah, aghast.

"They have been in the kitchen this ten minutes, my lady," she whispered, "asking questions of us all—Mr. Sanders and Mrs. Timms and me and cook, all separate. And now they are going round the house to search it, and see to the fastenings."

The men came out again and moved away, Deborah following slowly in their wake: she appeared to regard them with somewhat of the curiosity we give to a wild animal: but Mr. Ravensworth recalled her. Lady Level entered the room again and sat down by the fire. Mr. Ravensworth again observed that he must be going: he had barely time to walk to the station and catch the train.

"Arnold, if you go, and leave me with these men in the house, I will never forgive it!" she passionately uttered.

He looked at her in surprise. "I thought you wished for the presence of the police. You said you should regard them as a protection."

"Did *you* send for them?" she breathlessly exclaimed.

"Certainly not."

She sank into a reverie; a deep, unpleasant reverie that compressed her lips and contracted her brow. Suddenly she lifted her head.

"He is my husband, after all, Arnold."

"To be sure he is."

"And therefore—and therefore—there had better be no investigation."

"Why?" asked Mr. Ravensworth, scarcely above his breath.

"Because he does not wish it," she answered, bending her face downwards. "He forbade me to call in aid, or to suffer it to be called in; and, as I say, he is my husband. Will you stop those men in their search; will you send them away?"

"I do not think I have the power to do so."

"You can forbid them in Lord Level's name. I give you full authority: as he would do, were he capable of acting. Arnold, I *will* have them out of the house. I *will*."

"What is it that you fear from them?"

"I fear—I cannot tell you what I fear. They might question me."

"And if they did?—you can only repeat to them what you told me."

"No, it must not be," she shivered. "I—I—dare not let it be."

Mr. Ravensworth paused. "Blanche," he said, in a low tone, "have you told me all?"

"Perhaps not," she slowly answered.

"'Perhaps!'"

"There!" she exclaimed, springing up in wild excitement. "I hear those men upstairs, and you stand here idly talking! Order them away in Lord Level's name."

Desperately perplexed, Mr. Ravensworth flew to the stairs. The steward, pale and agitated, met him half-way up. "It must not be looked into by the police," he whispered. "Sir, it must not. Will you speak to them: you may have more weight with them than I. Say you are a friend of my lord's. I strongly suspect this is the work of that meddling Macferraty."

Arnold Ravensworth moved forward as one in a dream, an undercurrent of thought asking what all this mystery meant. The steward followed. They found the men in one of the first rooms: not engaged in the examination of its fastenings or its closets (and the whole house abounded in closets and cupboards), but with their heads together, talking in whispers.

In answer to Mr. Ravensworth's peremptory demand, made in Lord Level's name, that the search should cease and the house be freed of their presence, they civilly replied that they must not leave, but would willingly retire to the kitchen and there await their superior officer, who was on his road to the house: and they went down accordingly. Mr. Ravensworth returned to the sitting-room to acquaint Lady Level with the fact, but found she had disappeared. In a moment she came in, scared, her hands lifted in dismay, her breath coming in gasps.

"Give me air!" she cried, rushing to the window and motioning to have it opened. "I shall faint; I shall die."

"Whatever is the matter?" questioned Mr. Ravensworth, as he succeeded in undoing the bolt of the window, and throwing up its middle compartment. At that moment a loud ring came to the outer gate. It increased her terror, and she broke into a flood of tears.

"My dear young lady, let me be your friend," he said in his grave concern. "Tell me the whole truth. I know you have not done so yet. Let it be what it will, I promise to—if possible—shield you from harm."

"Those men are saying in the kitchen that it was I who attacked Lord Level; I overheard them," she shuddered, the words coming from her brokenly in her agitation.

"Make a friend of me; you shall never have a truer," he continued, for really he knew not what else to urge, and he could not work in the dark. "Tell me all from beginning to end."

But she only shivered in silence.

"Blanche!—did—you—do—it?"

"No," she answered, with a low burst of heartrending sobs. "*But I saw it done.*"

(To be continued.)

SPES.

"When we meet," she said. We never
Met again—the world is wide:
Leagues of sea, then death, did sever
Me from my betrothëd bride.
When we parted, long ago—
Long it seems in sorrow musing—
Fair she stood, with face aglow,
In my heart a hope infusing.
Now I linger at the grave,
While the winds of winter rave.

"When we meet!" The words are ringing
Clear, as when they left her lips,
Clear, as when her faith upspringing
Fronted life, and life's eclipse.
Rest, dear heart, dear hands, dear feet;
Rest! In spite of Death's endeavour,
Thou art mine, we soon shall meet—
Ocean, Death, be passed for ever.
Thus I linger by the grave,
Cherishing the hope she gave.

John Jervis Beresford, M.A.

SOMETHING ABOUT PILCHARDS.

How they are Caught and How to Cook them.

IS a sprat a herring, and is the pilchard allied to either of these in any way?

These questions have often been asked and variously answered. One thing at any rate is certain: the three have many things in common. They are always met with in shoals; they are migratory, visiting certain parts of our coast at different seasons, and suddenly retiring, though no one can say exactly where they go; and they have all, when eaten fresh, a rich, oily flavour, and are uncommonly good and nutritious as articles of food.

However, we are firmly and fully persuaded that a sprat is not a herring in any stages of its growth: neither is the pilchard a herring or a sprat.

There are structural peculiarities which seem to us conclusively to settle this matter. Take a fresh herring by the tail, and pass your finger to and fro the whole length of the under side of the fish, and you will find it perfectly smooth. Do this with a fresh sprat and you will run your finger on the teeth of a finely-cut saw; for the belly of the sprat, as the naturalists term it, is serrated.

But what are we to say about the pilchard? The belly is not serrated, therefore it is not a sprat. Is it a herring then? No. This was pointed out to us years ago by a very interesting old fish-woman who kept a stall in the Plymouth market and who knew a great deal about the habits of sea fish generally, and of the pilchards in particular.

"Look you here, sir. Take a herring by the dorsal fin and the head will be found heavier than the tail; do the like with the pilchard and the head and tail will be evenly balanced. That's the difference between them. Ah! pilchards is a beautiful fish!"

And the old woman was right; whether seen in shoals at sea or cooked for breakfast, "pilchards is a beautiful fish."

Our first acquaintance with cooked pilchards was made at Penzance.

We were out for a summer holiday, and, having passed many years in the extreme east of England, within easy reach of the coast where the "long-shore" herrings abound, we made up our minds this year to visit the Cornish coast, and try fresh pilchards for a change.

Our visit fortunately was well-timed. The very first morning after our arrival at Penzance, somewhere about six o'clock—so early that we were hardly awake—we heard the welcome cry: "Fresh pilchards! pilchards all alive! eight-a-penny, pilchards!"

We rushed to the bedroom window, and there, sure enough, was

a farmer's large cart loaded with these silvery fish. Our good-natured landlady, the wife of a retired coast-guardsman, secured for us a pennyworth for breakfast, and cooked them to perfection.

The pilchard is a very oily fish, and when eaten fresh is best fried, requiring nothing but its own fat to fry it in. Fresh, or white herrings, as they are called on the Norfolk coast, should be boiled, and fresh sprats done on a gridiron. All these three sorts of fish, to be eaten in perfection, ought to be cooked within an hour or two after they are caught. They will not keep twenty-four hours as fresh fish, and their flavour is destroyed by packing. However cooked, they should be sent to table quite hot, and touched with nothing but a silver knife and fork.

Many persons find the sharp bones of these delicious fish very troublesome, but nothing is easier than to draw out every bone, and leave the flesh perfectly free. Make a small incision along the back of the fish; then, with the fork at the tail, draw out the backbone to the head; and in this way not only the backbone but all the fine lateral bones will be drawn out, and the flesh left entirely free.

From Penzance we made our way to the Lizard and the Land's End, and thence by rail to Newquay, the very centre of the pilchard fisheries. The place itself, independently of its importance as a fishing station, is well worthy of a visit. It is charmingly situated at the head of two beautiful bays, with splendid, hard sands at low water, skirted by high rocky cliffs in which are some most curious caverns.

It is with the pilchard fishing, however, that we are at present concerned.

In the pretty little tidal port about the centre of the place, at the time of our visit, the pilchard boats were lying, all properly equipped and ready at any moment to put to sea.

It should be mentioned that there are two modes of catching pilchards: the drift net and the seine. The former is used chiefly on the south coast, where the fish are not so plentiful, and the latter on the north-west, where the largest shoals are to be met with. The drift net is carried about by the tide, and catches such fish as become entangled in its meshes. The seine encircles an entire shoal, and, unless any accident occurs, captures the whole. As many as 5,000 hogsheads of pilchards have in this way been taken at one time.

Seine fishing is carried on by companies, each company owning three boats—the Seine boat, thirty-seven feet long; the "Vollier," or follower as it is named, about the same size; and another small boat called a "Larker." The expenses of outfit are very large; as much, we were told, as £1,500 a company.

There are several of these companies or "concerns" in Newquay alone, and the fishing is carried out under rules and regulations in force among them.

Each company in the season has its allotted station, so that when a shoal, or "school," which is the local name, appears, all

confusion is avoided. Upon the heights that surround the bays at Newquay, tall posts are fixed which mark the boundaries of the different stations; and no company is allowed "to shoot its seine" out of its "turn," except in the absence of the boats deputed to occupy the adjoining station. The same stations are not always occupied by the same company; changes are continually being made; but no change is made except by general consent. From August to November is reckoned "the season," and the best fish are said to be those last taken. The received opinion is that pilchards are spawned all round the Scilly Islands, and that when the warm weather comes, in August, they migrate in shoals northwards, returning to their winter quarters in November, by which time they are all full grown fish.

The complement of each seine is reckoned at about twenty men, who, in addition to high wages, have also a share in the "concern." The employment is a profitable one in most years, and occasionally very large sums are realised by the men as well as the owners.

Besides those who man the boats there are others stationed on the different cliffs, one to each station, under the name of "Huers," whose duty it is to keep watch over the water and give immediate notice of a shoal. These men, through their glasses, watch anxiously for a silver, streaky flash upon the waves; "a break," as it is locally termed; and as anyone who marks it is assured that by the "colour" it means a shoal, he raises a great trumpet, four feet long, to his mouth and gives "the cry."

This cry is taken up all round and along the cliffs, and in the town there is a general excitement. The Huer in whose "turn" the shoal appears is always the most excited, and the boats belonging to his company are the first to put to sea. No time is to be lost. The Huer in whose turn the fish are gives directions to the boats, and at his signal the seine pulls ahead to intercept the "school."

The net is now paid out as fast as hands can move, and in about five minutes a heavy seine of one hundred and ten fathoms and seventy feet in depth, with leads and corks, is cast overboard to encircle, if possible, the whole shoal. It is, however, seldom that one seine can manage this, so that the boat whose turn is next is always in readiness "to shoot."

As soon as the fish are well enclosed, the boats begin warping the net against the tide, bringing the two ends together and making them fast. The next thing is to haul the seine with its load of fish by means of ropes into the shallow water, and now the fish are tolerably secure. Loud and long is the cheering as the people see the jumping and sparkle of the fish in captivity within the seine.

To get the fish out of the seine is the next operation, and it requires some little care and judgment. This is called "tucking," and it is carried on by means of a small net or "tuck net," which is placed inside the seine, and when full, emptied by means of buckets into boats, which, as they are filled, carry off the fish to the pier.

The news of a take of pilchards soon spreads; and the "fish-jowsters'" carts are always at hand to take off as much fish as the owners are contented to sell upon the spot. The great bulk, however, is carried off to the cellars, which usually belong to the different companies. In these cellars the fish are "bulked" and "pressed," as it is termed, for the foreign market.

The process is well worth seeing. Many of these cellars are themselves curiously formed out of the solid rock on which Newquay stands; others are brick buildings. Women are mostly engaged in "bulking." As soon as the cart-loads of pilchards are shot down on the cellar floor, the women, assisted by a number of boys and girls, who carry to them the fish in baskets, begin to build them up in a heap against the cellar wall; in layers of fish and layers of salt alternately; till the mass, running the whole length of the cellar wall and six feet in breadth, is raised five feet in height.

This work goes on with the greatest rapidity night and day, amidst much shouting, chattering and laughter, until the whole quantity has been "bulked," and in this state the pilchards are left for five or six weeks. They are then taken out of "bulk," carefully washed and neatly packed in properly-prepared barrels.

These barrels, as soon as filled, are placed under presses of great power, and by this process each hogshead is made to yield from one to three gallons of oil. The barrels stand for pressure on a grooved floor, and the oil by this means runs off readily into tanks sunk to receive it.

The pilchards, after repacking, are closed down and the barrels made ready for shipment. Pilchards thus prepared are called "Fumadoes," a name which the Cornish fishermen have corrupted into "Fairmaids." Each hogshead is calculated to hold about 2,700 pilchards, and to weigh about $4\frac{1}{4}$ hundredweight. The price of course varies considerably; ranging, as far as we could learn, from 30*s.* to 75*s.* per hogshead. The oil makes a valuable addition, but we can give no idea of its price per hogshead as it leaves the tanks.

The chief export trade for cured pilchards is with the Italians. Pilchards are also cured for home consumption, and very good they are, whether sold as "pilchards in oil in tins," or "marinated in jars." The former can be bought at the London stores at $9\frac{1}{2}d.$ per tin, and the latter at $11\frac{1}{2}d.$ per jar. In tins the fish are prepared like sardines, and may be eaten as they are, either cooked or not. In jars, "marinated" as it is called, they are preserved in vinegar.

The reader, who is interested in such matters will not fail to remark the peculiar terms used by the Cornish fishermen. They are of Norman-French derivation, marking the origin and antiquity of the custom.

HENRY V. DUNSTER.

A MARRIAGE IN THE DARK.

AT ten years of age I, Constance Urquhart, was stricken with blindness. As well as I can remember, this did not happen suddenly; the sense of sight became obscured by degrees. A slight mist seemed at first to veil my eyes, the outlines of objects became blurred and indistinct, colours lost their vividness and blended confusedly with each other, and I was startled at times by flashes of almost intolerable brightness. Gradually the mist deepened into twilight, and twilight into the blackness of night.

I was too young to realise fully the extent of the calamity which had befallen me. My mother disliked talking about it and always endeavoured to evade my questions. Only now and then I could hear her weeping quietly to herself. At first I was terribly frightened, I thought in my childish mind that the sun had departed for ever, and that eternal darkness enveloped mankind. Gradually the truth dawned upon me. I, only, and a few other unfortunates, it would seem, were to be excluded from the light of day. Others could see; for them the sun and the stars continued to shine; for them the leaves grew green in summer and brown and gold in autumn, and still the world was fair. From me, alas, even the familiar face of my dearly-loved mother was hidden, and she became a voice and a presence, heard and felt indeed, but unseen. I was alone in the dark.

In imagination I saw stretched out before me the long, melancholy vista of my life. Life under a ban; set apart and indescribably solitary; to be lived through somehow amid deep gloom until it merged at last into the profounder shadow of death. Many a time I have thought it would be better to die at once and be done with it; many a time I have rebelled indignantly against my fate and shed bitter tears over it: so unmerited did it seem to me; so unjust.

And then slowly, almost imperceptibly, a new world began to open out for me. A mysterious world full of surprises and revelations, of incredible things. A strange world, in which every variation of texture, every inflection of sound, carried with it new and pregnant meanings; where touch became a talisman and hearing was the key-stone of knowledge; and over which music ruled with indisputable sway, the sole source of consolation and delight.

The specialists who had been consulted about my case held out little prospect of ultimate recovery, but hope never entirely died within me. Now and then faint glimmers passed across my eyes like the first filtrations of light at earliest dawn; but these departed as they came and left me in my accustomed darkness. Always they brought with them a thrill of wild delight and longing, and were followed by the reaction of profound despair.

As year after year passed away and brought no change in my condition, I grew by degrees resigned and even, in a half-hearted way, contented with my lot.

Occasionally I had a relapse. I remember on my twenty-first birthday I sat before my useless looking-glass twisting and untwisting the long coils of my hair, and wondering, for the first time in my life, what I was like. It may seem strange that I had never speculated upon this before, but it was not really so. Good-looks and bad-looks had in fact no significance for me. The voice only was of importance; by that I judged character and formed my likings and antipathies.

But on this particular day I felt an overwhelming desire to know in what guise I presented myself to the outer world. I was familiar with the shape of my face, as far as I could judge of it from touch. My nose seemed straight, my mouth small, my hair soft and abundant. But these things conveyed little tangible impression to my mind. I longed desperately to see myself, if only for an instant, to lift for a brief second the everlasting veil of night which hung over me. Placing my elbows on the table, I strained my eyes at the glass. I exerted all the force of my will. Was I successful? My nerves throbbed, and across my eyes passed a faint, ghastly glimmer. It grew brighter, brighter than I had ever seen it before, and then faded slowly away into blackness.

It was a sad disappointment. I laid my head down on the table and flooded those useless, sightless orbs of mine with tears.

My mother came in and found me weeping.

"What, crying, Conny?" she said with surprise, for I was not often taken so; "and on your birthday, too! My dear child, what is the matter?"

She sat down beside me and put her arms round me in her motherly, comforting way.

"It is only that I am foolish, mother, and can't resign myself to the inevitable. You will laugh when I tell you that I actually tried to see myself—yes, to see myself in the glass. Presumption, wasn't it? And I cried because I couldn't."

"Poor child! Poor Conny," said my mother, kissing me. "It is very, very sad for you, but I thought you had got used to it, dear, after all these years."

"There are some things one can't get used to, mother. But never mind that now. I want to hear what I am like. Am I beautiful, pretty, simply passable, or downright ugly? You never will tell me; but I'm twenty-one to-day, and I think it's quite time I knew."

"My child, to me you will always be beautiful."

"Do you know, mother, that is a most unsatisfactory answer. It sounds very pretty, but it tells me just nothing."

"You will find out all about it some day, my dear."

"I believe I'm as ugly as a witch, and that you are keeping it from me to spare my feelings."

My mother laughed softly to herself.

"I don't think anyone could call you ugly, Conny," she said.

And that was all I could get out of her; with this dubious information I was obliged to be contented. From that time forward I took it for granted that I was a very plain young woman, and began to think it was just as well I could not see my image in the glass. Perhaps this was the very impression which my mother, who was a wise woman in her way, wished to convey to me. Plain or pretty, however, it mattered very little; marriage for me was out of the question, had I been as fair as Cleopatra. What man but would prefer a homely wife with a pair of useful eyes in her head to the most beautiful blind woman in the world?

As my mother declined to give me any definite information, I was compelled perforce to remain in ignorance upon the interesting question of my personal appearance. I knew of no one else whom I could consult on the subject. The dull little country town in which we lived did not afford much material in the way of society, and perhaps we had neglected to make full use of our opportunities. My father, a medical man, had been dead many years, and lay buried in a crowded London cemetery; while the two hundred a year which we inherited on his death, though it sufficed to keep us in decent comfort, was far from enabling us to make a figure even in our own insignificant provincial circle.

With the exception of the curate, who called irregularly to look after our spiritual welfare, our only visitor was Dr. Browne, a veteran medical practitioner, and an old friend of my father's. He was the one link which connected us with the outside world, and upon him we depended entirely for our knowledge of its doings. By and by even this link was severed; the good old doctor died, and our isolation became complete. His practice, after being advertised for three months in the *Lancet*, was sold to a Dr. Saxon, whose arrival caused more excitement in our little provincial city than the advent of an Eastern prince would have made in London.

We had not expected that Dr. Saxon would call upon us unless professionally: we knew our own reputation for exclusiveness and unsociability. Nevertheless, call he did, more than once, and seemed to derive considerable satisfaction from his visits.

As a sole representative of society he certainly excelled Dr. Browne. He was younger, better read, knew more of the world, and could express himself always clearly and sometimes even brilliantly. His visits became to me a source of keen pleasure. I liked the tones of his deep voice, the firm grip of his hand, the sound of his quick alert tread. On his side he was good enough to express admiration for my musical talents; an admiration perhaps not altogether undeserved, for music was my one passion. The immense amount of time and

enthusiasm which I had devoted to piano-practice would have been sadly wasted had I not become a tolerable mistress of the key-board.

In a lesser degree Dr. Saxon shared my musical raptures. He was himself a respectable violin player, and one result of our numerous duets was that we became fast friends.

A first friendship is generally a significant episode in one's existence, but to me it was something far more. It was both an awakening and a revelation. All the pent-up sympathies of years rushed along this new outlet, life became a changed thing, full of fresh hopes and wider possibilities, and containing, as it seemed, compensations, even for me. Without being consciously in love with Dr. Saxon, I yet felt that he was becoming indispensable to my existence.

I was standing, one evening in early autumn, by the French window which opened out upon our little lawn. I knew by the time, and by a certain indefinite sensation which it always produces in me, that the sun was near its setting, and I happened to be seized with one of the vain fits of helpless longing, and impotent resentment, with which I occasionally varied the monotony of resignation. It was the old, weary, futile lament that I indulged in now and then, for the sake of the relief it brought me, but of which I was, none the less, heartily ashamed.

"Oh! that I could pierce the veil and see God's daylight again! Oh! for a glimpse of the free wide sky, touched into glory by the setting sun! For that, I would willingly give up the balance of my life. What, indeed, is life to me? A poor, helpless wretch, a burden to myself, and utterly useless to others."

"Pardon me, Miss Urquhart, but I think your life may yet be of great use to others. And as for your burden, your friends will endeavour to make it light for you."

I had spoken my Jeremiad aloud, as was my wont when I thought myself alone, and so pre-occupied was I that even my keen hearing failed to detect Dr. Saxon's quick step across the lawn. It was the first time that the subject of my blindness had been, even indirectly, hinted at between us, and I felt myself blushing with shame and mortification. It was certainly annoying to be thus caught unpacking one's soul with words, and such weak ones.

"What will you think of me, doctor? I am afraid my reputation for fortitude is gone. It is very unlucky that you should have overheard my lamentations. But they do not mean very much. A kind of moral safety-valve; that's all."

The doctor took my light speech for what it was worth, and answered gravely and gently.

"Dear Miss Urquhart, I think, for my part, that you bear your affliction with admirable resignation."

"Admirable indeed, when I was railing, in good set terms, at things in general, two minutes ago."

"Ah, well, your railing was innocent enough. You would be more or less than human, if you didn't feel a little bitter at times, and it is better to give it vent, and have done with it. May I ask, to adopt the professional manner, what was the exciting cause this evening?"

"Perverseness, doctor, that's all; and a vapourish longing for the moon: or, what to me is as difficult of attainment, a peep at the sunset. A foolish wish—my sun set for ever eleven years ago."

"Let me enlist my eyes in your service, for once, and describe it to you as best I can."

"I thank you, Doctor Saxon; it would give me great pleasure; the greatest pleasure. Next to seeing for oneself, the most pleasant thing, I should imagine, is to look through the eyes of other people."

"I don't think," said the doctor, with humorous gravity, "that as a describer of sunsets I should take rank in the very first class. I wish, for your sake, that I were a Ruskin, or a Théophile Gautier. Anyhow, I will do my best. In the first place, then, it happens to be a very fine sunset this evening."

"I was sure of it."

"From where we are standing, one can just catch a glimpse of the river, as it winds round under a low wooded hill. Perhaps you remember it, and the slender, thread-like spire that rises among the trees at the top?"

"It is so long since I saw it, though I have lived here all my life: but yes, I think I do remember it."

"Well, the hill and the trees look black now against the sunset; and the spire is like a little sharply-cut silhouette, standing out against a gold background. As for the river, it is cool and dark where it runs along under the hill-side, but beyond that the sun strikes it, and it glows like a flame."

"Ah!"

"Across the sky are drawn many irregular bars of clouds, looking like long purple promontories running far away into a wide sea of gold and orange and green, and this sea gets brighter and brighter as it nears the great central glow, and then fades imperceptibly into the quiet blue of the night, out of which the stars are already beginning to look down on us."

"How very beautiful it must be," said I, with an involuntary sigh.

"Beautiful it is, but that hardly expresses it all. It is grand, solemn, imposing; looking at it one's mind seems somehow to get purified, one's whole being enlarged, you are filled with a sense of mental and physical spaciousness. To me it looks like the vista of a world to come—appears the promise of a future state. It is sublime; the element of beauty is subordinate. The purely beautiful," murmured the doctor under his breath, "is nearer at hand."

The words, however, were not so softly spoken but that my quick ear had caught their import.

"I don't quite know what you mean by that, doctor," said I.

"Well," he answered, after a second's hesitation, "you must forgive me if I confess frankly that I was thinking of yourself, Miss Urquhart."

"Of me!" I ejaculated, too much astonished to be coherent. "Surely you are joking."

"Do you really mean to say that you don't know what you are like?"

I reflected. I certainly did not know. I had, indeed, a general impression that I was painfully plain. Still, it was possible to be mistaken. Here was an opportunity of acquiring knowledge. To neglect it might be unwise. "It sounds very ridiculous, I daresay," I answered slowly, "but I am obliged to admit that I haven't the slightest notion what I am like."

"Impossible!"

"Easily possible; and in addition, quite true."

"Miss Urquhart," said the doctor after a pause, to enable himself to grasp fully this stupendous fact: "you are, indeed, a phenomenon; a rara avis among young ladies; but such a state of things is abnormal and portentous. Let me do for you what I tried to do for the sunset just now, and hold in my clumsy way the mirror up to nature. I will be your looking-glass—a most imperfect one—and tell you a little about yourself."

"I shall be delighted. That is if you will promise to be severely accurate and neither critical nor complimentary."

"I will be the strictly impartial observer; and as I will nothing exaggerate so I will set down naught in malice."

"Very well—go on, then—imprimis."

"Imprimis, you are tall."

"I know it," said I calmly; "five feet seven."

"You are aware of that; very well. To particularise further: your hair is abundant and of an indescribable golden-brown colour; your forehead good, intellectually speaking; artistically—here the impartial observer asserts himself—it may be, perhaps, a thought too high; a defect, if it be a defect, which is corrected by the natural wave of the hair. Eye-brows well-defined and mathematically arched. As for the eyes themselves, they are large, bright, and of a clear hazel. Except for a far away look, which tells us doctors a good deal, no one would imagine that you had not—well, the perfect use of them. They are shaded by long lashes, nose straight, and delicately chiselled; mouth ——"

"Pray spare me further details and get on at once to the general effect."

"Now, I call that unreasonable. You can no more get a general effect without details than you can make a wall without bricks. However, I will be as brief as possible. To proceed, then: your chin, Miss Urquhart, I speak as impartially as I can, is—well, perfect. There is in the centre of it a very effective dimple."

"Please, doctor," I protested.

"Facial outline," continued he, imperturbably, "a pure oval; complexion, a very admirable blending of red and white."

"Doctor Saxon, I shall leave the room if you don't stop."

"The impartial observer apologises; and being admonished, leaves detailed criticism and hastens to sum up. His conclusion—on which he is prepared to stake his professional reputation—is that you have rare beauty, Miss Urquhart, and that of a very superior order. He trusts you are not offended."

"Oh, how could I be? But I think you are very much mistaken."

"Not in the least, I assure you. It isn't a question of mere prettiness, about which there might easily be a difference of taste. No two opinions are possible in your case."

It was true then. I believed I could trust the doctor's judgment, and there was no mistaking the sincere ring of his voice. I trembled with pleasure. Vain was all my careful schooling and elaborately-evolved indifference to personal appearance. Here was I, a very woman, glowing with pride and pleasure at the thought that some poor share of personal beauty had fallen to my lot. Instinct is ineradicable, I suppose, and it is a woman's instinct to like to look pretty. My exaltation, however, was of brief duration. The next moment I was sounding the depths, overwhelmed by the thought of my blindness. My eyes filled with angry tears. I felt that the doctor was watching me, and turned my head aside. Then I heard him rise and pace up and down the room. Presently he halted and stood in front of me.

"Miss Urquhart," said he abruptly: "I came this evening to say good-bye; I am going up to London for six months."

"To London!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. I want to complete some surgical studies in one of the great hospitals."

"Why, I thought you had finished your student's career long ago."

"That is true in the ordinary sense; but a scientific man is more or less a student all his life. There is a subject in which I am deeply interested. I have a theory of my own about it that I wish to test practically. Before I go I want to ask a favour of you, Miss Urquhart. Will you let me examine your eyes?"

I assented, as a matter of course. It was not the first time I had been examined by curious scientists, and rang the bell for the lamp.

Dr. Saxon made his examination with the greatest care. I do not think my eyes had ever before been subjected to so minute a scrutiny. His manner was wholly professional, his questions few and to the point.

"Have you ever had any sensation of light?" was his last demand: "any feeling that the darkness was lifting, so to speak?"

"Yes. Three or four times a kind of grey mist seemed to rise in front of me. It was very bright the last time. I almost thought I was going to see."

"How long ago was that?"

"Six months. On my twenty-first birthday."

"Ah! Thank you very much; I won't trouble you with any more questions. Really, how late it is getting! I must be off at once; my hands are very full just now, as you may suppose. Good-bye, Miss Urquhart. You have greatly obliged me by allowing me to make this examination."

"Do you think there is any hope for me?" I asked, plaintively.

"Hope! Of course—of course," said he, vaguely. "We doctors never give up that if we can help it. It is the finest of all medicines. Good-bye, once more!" And the doctor grasped my hand with a kind, firm pressure, and was gone.

It was fully twelve months before I saw him again. He went, I heard afterwards, first to London and thence, attracted by some great scientific luminaries, to Paris and Vienna. I am not ashamed to confess that the year of his absence appeared to me by far the longest in my life. With him my grasp on the realities of the world seemed to depart and I sank back, with a shudder, into my old formless, objectless, meaningless existence. True I had my mother, and the affection between us was deep and sincere; but there was too great a similarity about our mental processes; long familiarity had made us too well acquainted with every turn of the other's thought for our intercourse to be relieved much above the dead level of monotony. Music was my great solace, the chief weapon wherewith to ward off ennui and bring about a momentary feeling of contentment.

I have a rather fanciful habit, Wagnerian though it be, of associating certain airs with particular people. There is, for instance, a plaintive little melody of Mendelssohn's which invariably recalls my mother to me; and Dr. Saxon will always be linked in my mind with Raff's Cavatina, for I was playing it softly to myself one evening when I heard his step in the hall. I ceased at once, and the next moment the doctor was standing in front of me holding both my hands in his own.

"Well, Miss Urquhart," said he. "Here I am back again, and I hope you are very glad to see me."

"Very glad indeed," I answered, withdrawing my hands, for I felt myself blushing like a school-girl.

"And I am delighted to be here again. It seems so like home, after wandering about among the capitals of Europe."

"It gives me great pleasure to hear you say that."

"When I came into this room, just now, and heard the music, and

saw you seated at the piano in your white dress, with the fire-light glancing on your hair, I felt—I wish I could tell you how I felt."

"Surely you are not afraid of a poor blind girl?"

"Well, I am not quite so certain of that. You don't know how formidable you can look at times, Miss Urquhart."

"I'm sorry. I hadn't the least intention of looking formidable."

"Formidably lovely, I mean."

"You ought not to say such things, Dr. Saxon."

"I can't help myself; they come out against my will." The doctor paused, and then went on in a sudden burst of energy. "I must make a clean breast of it, now or never. Dear Miss Urquhart, —Constance—the fact is, I love you. I have done so, it seems to me, from the first. Forgive my stupid, blundering way of saying it. I have come to ask you to be my wife."

A proposal of marriage! I could hardly believe my ears. Was the world coming to an end? So extraordinary and unlooked-for an occurrence fairly took my breath away, and rendered me for the moment speechless.

But the doctor was a man of action, and had heard somewhere that silence indicates consent. His arm stole gently round my waist, and I felt his lips on my cheek.

For a moment I let myself go. The sense of repose, of rest, of protecting affection, was too delicious, and I loved the doctor. I realised it now for the first time. Then I knew, or fancied I knew, that I was not doing my duty; and it is a pity that duty should be so often disagreeable. It did not seem to me that my way of life ran along such pleasant paths as these. I disengaged his arm and pulled myself together.

"Dr. Saxon," I stammered, "I am grateful to you, believe me; deeply grateful. But you must see that this is impossible. Marry a woman who will assist you to fight the battle of life; don't be dragged down by a poor sightless wretch like me. It is too great a sacrifice."

"Sacrifice! Rubbish!" the doctor cried. "Who talks of sacrifice? The only question is, do you care for me?"

I turned my head aside; he was reading my face, I knew, and that was betraying me.

The next moment he had me in his arms.

"Ah, I see how it is," he cried triumphantly; "you do love me, Conny, just a little, don't you?"

"Well, yes; if you must know."

"And you can talk of sacrifice," he went on, still a little indignant. "The sacrifice is all on your side, if you only knew it, you lovely simpleton. How do you suppose a poor ugly devil of a hardworking commonplace doctor could hope to win one of the most beautiful women in England"—for so he talked in his infatuation—"if she had all her senses about her? I am simply the luckiest medical man in the United Kingdom."

What did I care if he were poor and ugly, it was enough that we loved each other. That was material sufficient for happiness.

And happy we were, to a degree which a short time before I should have thought impossible on earth. It was only when my first baby was born to me that I began again to regret my want of sight.

I was assured on all sides that my child was a miracle of infantine loveliness, and though by no means unwilling to believe this, I felt a natural longing to be able to judge for myself. Often I passed my hand over the soft baby features, and tried to picture them in my mind, but so long had I lived in darkness that it was difficult for me to form even the idea of a face. I don't think I had at this time any hope of ever regaining my sight, though, to please my husband, I bathed my eyes regularly, night and morning, with a certain lotion he gave me.

Imagine then the astonishment, almost the awe, I felt when my dear doctor said to me one day: "You will want all your courage to-morrow, Conny; but I think you have plenty."

"Courage for what?" I asked innocently.

"I am going to operate on your eyes, dearest. And may God give me skill!"

Light! light at last! Only the dim uncertain light of a darkened room it is true, but how glorious, how divine it seemed. The first glimpse of land to a shipwrecked sailor, the vision of Paradise to a tempted saint, I can only compare it to such things; things long-hoped for, keenly desired, despaired of, and found at last. But all comparisons are weak enough to express the rapture, the almost frantic joy, the passionate gratitude that filled my heart.

I know I screamed aloud, and in an instant the bandages were replaced.

The first thing I saw distinctly when I was permitted to use my newly recovered sense a little was my boy in his nurse's arms. My informants had not deceived me. Nothing surely could be brighter than his eyes, more charming than his expression, or more altogether delightful than the little dimpled fist which clutched at my finger when they placed him on my knee. Then I turned to look for my husband, my hero. I owed it all to him; eyesight, happiness, a greater gift than life itself. It was for this he had studied in London, and worked in Paris and Vienna. To be grateful enough for such an immense obligation was impossible, but I longed to thank him, however inadequately, for what he had done for me.

A tall, dark, very distinguished-looking young man was standing by my chair gazing down upon me with kindly brown eyes. I remember wondering who he could be.

"Can't you guess my name, Conny?" said he.

My husband's voice! The veil between us was rent at last. I flung

my arms round his neck and looked at him with pride and wonder. How could he say he was ugly and commonplace?

"Why did you tell me such stories?" were my first words to him. My husband laughed.

"You see, darling," said he, "you had got an idea into that pretty little head of yours that I was making some sort of a sacrifice. By running myself down a little—not much—I thought to make matters easier. But come with me. I want to show you the kind of sacrifice I made."

And my husband slipped my arm within his own, and piloted me carefully out of the room and along the passage: for I was at first very uncertain about distances, and sometimes even shut my eyes in order to move about more confidently. We entered a cozy little chamber in which a bright fire was burning. A carefully-shaded moderator lamp stood on a small table, and not far from it were placed two magnificent cheval glasses.

"Now, Conny," said my husband, "I want you to look straight in front of you, and to give me your candid opinion of what you see there."

I looked obediently, but the sense of sight was too recently acquired for me to perceive, at once, the nature of the things I gazed at. The reflection I saw in the glass seemed to me a mysterious kind of picture. I recognised my husband's figure, and beside him stood a tall, handsome girl, with fair hair and brilliant eyes. His arm was round her waist, and she leaned upon him confidently, apparently very much at home.

"She is exceedingly pretty," said I, startled into admiration. "But who ——" I stopped short, for as I turned half jealously towards him the figure in the glass turned too. "Why, it is my own reflection," was my wondering exclamation.

"Little Vanity," said my husband laughing. "As if you didn't know who it was!"

But I protest I didn't.

C. H. Palmer.

LETTERS FROM MAJORCA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Under Northern Skies," etc., etc.

Palma de Mallorca. June, 1887.

George Sand's Corridor.

My Dear E.—In my last letter I told you that my days here were drawing to an end. I declared that this would probably be my concluding letter from sunny Palma de Mallorca. Nothing is more certain than that time rolls on and is never still. There are occasions in our lives when we would arrest its flow, if it were possible, but we cannot cheat ourselves even into a passing fancy of success. There are moments that, if prolonged ad infinitum, life might extend itself to eternity, and we should not weary. But the flush of happiness and the "pallid, sorrowful face" must alike yield to the inevitable. "Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow."

In these later letters, you have remarked, in replying to me, that I treat less of the island itself than of the incidents and their dramatis personæ which have absorbed my attention. This could not be avoided. In each succeeding letter I have merely sent you records of my daily life. Whether they were the poetical, artistic, love-stricken doings of H. C.; the manœuvrings of A. to keep us out of the Fonda del Pastor, at a respectful distance from the charms of Rosita and Mariquita; excursions into the interior, or gambols with Don Negro: I have simply held up to your contemplation the short and simple annals of our pastoral life in this Mallorca de las Baleares.

Perhaps you have not altogether lost by this change of interests. To very many, people are more interesting than places; the simplest domestic drama more welcome than the grandest earthly scenery.

Sydney Smith declared that he preferred people to trees, and streets to fields, and I fancy that he has the majority with him.

As for Mallorca, beautiful and interesting though it be, it is after all only a small island. On the occasion of my second visit, when you honoured me with your commands to continue my record, and keep you posted up in my summer as well as my winter sojourn, I confess that I trembled for the result. How was I to take up my pen again, go a second time over the old ground, and escape at your hands the verdict of flat, stale and unprofitable? I did not then know what was before me; that domestic events, not pastoral scenes, would for the most part make up the sum total of my daily life.

This daily life has shaped its own course, and I have had nothing in the controlling thereof. What it has been up to the date of my last letter, has been faithfully recorded to you. I could do no more.

I repeat that anxiety has marked our days: alternate hope and fear. The happy telegrams we trusted to send to England are still unwritten. There has been no verdict of "Out of danger:" and Convalescence still lies in the mysterious and unknown future.

James has gone on satisfactorily. There has been no anxiety about him. His symptoms have been of the ordinary type, and he battles well with prostration. The poor fellow has now reached the "hunger" stage, and his craving for food is hard to witness. It must be still harder to bear. I believe that, like Esau, he would almost sell his future for a mess of potage. But fortunately for him, he is not submitted to the temptation: the mess of potage is not forthcoming. The doctor is relentless in his path of duty; the nurses dare not transgress. He looks at me appealingly sometimes, as if he considered me a last refuge for the destitute, but I can give him no consolation. Then he feels that indeed there is no help for him in man. He turns his face to the wall; and his groans are hollow. This enforced hunger is of course one of the most painful phases of the disease. I remember some years ago going through the fever ward of a children's hospital in London. One of them was crying bitterly. I asked the reason. "A case of typhoid," said N. D., who was then house-surgeon. "She is crying because she is ravenously hungry, and they won't give her anything to eat." It was really very heartrending. All pain, all suffering, all disease and privation, is harder to witness in childhood and youth than in full manhood. Happily it is in point of fact easier to bear.

In these last days—I might almost say last hours—of my stay in this Palma de Mallorca, I take up my pen with thoughts inexpressibly sad. That inherent melancholy which, like Gray's hero, has "marked me for her own," asserts her sway. But in all last things: last days, last impressions, last good-byes: there must be this element of sadness for those who do not live that butterfly life, which is so pleasant, no doubt, but so fleeting.

And it is true to human nature, that the past shall generally appear

in rose colour; all that was painful is forgotten; that which charmed only is remembered. This is singular, for pain is a greater power than pleasure. In all pleasure there is a certain undercurrent of absolute pain. "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought." The two are inseparable. But pain has it all its own way. It reigns paramount. It is not a divided emotion. Its consolation lies in the old Trappist motto: Memento Mori.

How little I foresaw what was before me when I came out a second time to these Balearic Islands. Yet, could I have seen the end from the beginning, still I should have come. There has been care and anxiety, but there has also been le revers de la médaille, with a sufficient compensation. And for my own part, I believe that I love more to visit familiar scenes than to tread new ground. In the latter case, no doubt, all is fresh and startling; impressions are vivid. But all is accompanied by a certain restlessness of mind. You are ever on the alert, wondering what will come next. In the former case, there is greater repose. It is like clasping the hand of an old friend: and you know that the hand-clasp will be returned. There will be no cold grasp to throw you back upon yourself, chilled, disillusioned: an experience as destroying to friendship as an Arctic blast to the hope of harvest.

Therefore there ought to have been much repose in this second visit to Mallorca. I have seen no new ground, formed no new impressions, except on my first arrival at Alcudia, and in my visit to the Albufera and Pollensa: with which, after all, Alcudia is associated.

But, Alcudia alone would be worth a visit to Mallorca. As I have told you, it is one of those places that leave behind them a distinctive and vivid impression: as present when you have passed away from it as when you were gazing upon its ruined walls. I have not seen Pompeii for five years, yet the very lava stones of its streets, the frescoes of its walls, are before me at this moment; I still hear the echoes of our footsteps in the deserted thoroughfares. It is five years since I saw the Alhambra, yet I could close my eyes and trace for you its refined courts and archways, the chiselled devices upon its walls. I still hear the plashing of the fountain in the Court of Lyons, and see the custodian plucking for us the luscious Japanese medlars in the Garden of Lindajara. So, five years hence, if I should be running my race, I shall still see before me the ruined walls of Alcudia, and feel the insecurity of my foothold as we mounted the crumbling and decaying stairs that led us to their summit.

Yet in these last days I have not been quite stationary. I have seen no new places, but I have visited old haunts. Change is necessary to all; especially so to those who pass anxious days and nights in the atmosphere of a sick-room. The doctor was growing pale and fagged: and no wonder. Close confinement, hope deferred, the burden of uncertainty, these have been the sum and substance of daily experience. Therefore we agreed, on the first favourable morning, to

drive to Miramar, and spend a few hours in this, perhaps, loveliest spot of beautiful Mallorca.

The day and the hour came, and we departed. Once more the lordly barouche displayed its charms for our benefit. I had no longer H. C. beside me to make a foot-rest of my tripod, and to kiss the earth as he skipped gracefully over the barouche doors. The doctor was of course more serious; stood upon his dignity, as behoved one of weighty cares and grave responsibilities. Nevertheless, as far as was possible, we determined to compete with the sunshine, and have nothing to do with melancholy.

Our old coachman, Paolo, had not the honour of driving us to-day, though we had expressly bargained for him—upon the principle of returning good for evil. A new man reigned in his stead. We intended to alight at the Hospiteria, and a goodly hamper of provisions was under his charge on the box. We had once just escaped starvation, solely through the goodness and hospitality of the Archduke; but to-day there was no Archduke to take compassion upon us. It was only yesterday that I had bid him farewell on board the steamer that for some months was to convey him away from the island.

It was a perfect morning, but that goes without saying; these mornings, and days, and nights are always perfect in Mallorca. Every hour of every day spent in this climate and atmosphere is, to me, equal to two spent elsewhere. When I think of your winters in England, and your east winds, I ask myself where I shall find courage to return to them.

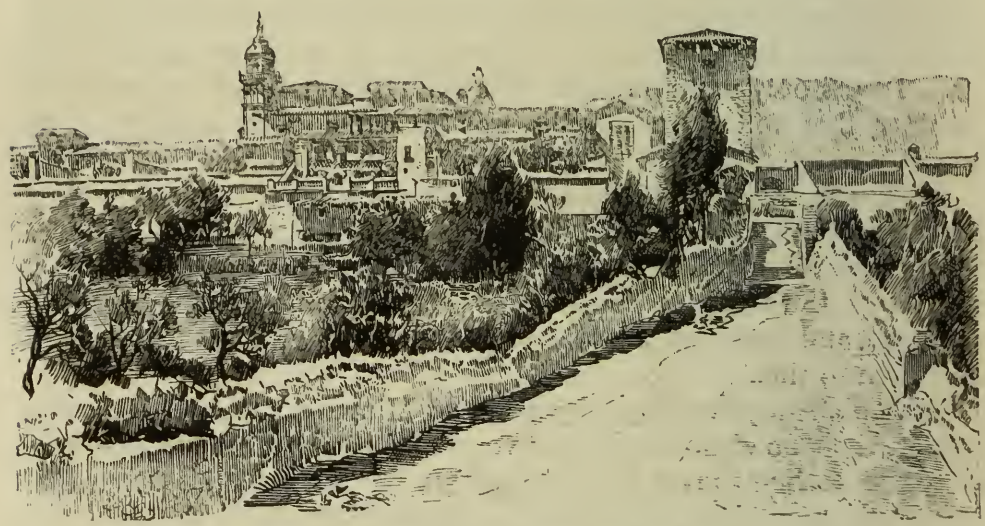
I have already described our drive to Miramar. True, it was then winter; it is now summer. But you must not imagine the difference of season to be as great here as it would be in England. Even then there was a certain luxuriance of vegetation, whilst the colouring seemed almost more vivid than it does now. For one thing, the wayside houses were adorned with endless strings and rows of Indian maize and the rich red of the capsicum. The white walls stood out in vivid contrast with all this splendour and gorgeousness of tint and tone. To-day, in our drive, the walls were bare, and one missed a distinctive and telling feature in the landscape.

You will remember our former drive. How, on approaching Valdemosa, we were overtaken by a thunderstorm, the violence of which: the fury of the rain, the crashing of the thunder, and the vividness of the unceasing lightning: seemed, indeed, fitting heralds for the crack of Doom. A storm and a fury, as sudden as it was relentless. One moment blue skies and balmy breezes: the next, the blackness of night; a rushing, mighty torrent, a cold blast of air, a fearful warfare of the elements, all crashing and crumbling about our heads in the sublime pass of Valdemosa; veiling the mountains, shaking the earth to its centre. You will remember how Paolo neglected his duty and never ordered our commissariat supply, and

that but for the accident of the forty-eight eggs and the hospitality of Miramar, we should have died of famine.

To-day on approaching Valdemosa there were no signs of a storm. The pass stood out in all its beauty, the mountains towered in the clear atmosphere in all their grandeur of form. Anything more romantic could scarcely be conceived: and a friend, who has seen much of the world, tells me that he thinks this part of Mallorca one of the sublimest spots of earth.

The little town, with its grey and sombre houses, slept in the hollow. The chain of hills divided, and made way for laughing valleys: valleys that are wonderfully fertile. All the rich fruits of the earth grow here in abundance. It is the cherry orchard par



EXTERIOR OF MONASTERY, VALDEMOSA.

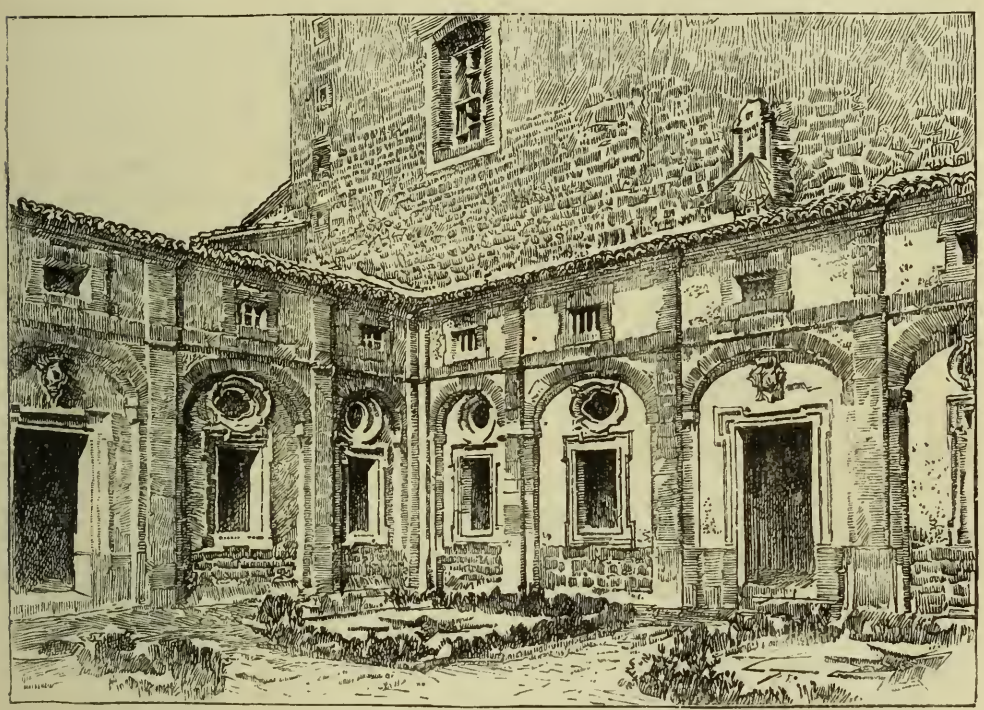
excellence of Mallorca. You should see these wonderful cherries; nay, more, you should taste them; and you would say that they are the ambrosia of Olympus, and should be distilled into nectar.

A chasm between the mountains, forming the upper part of the valley, was bridged by the ancient monastery; a building singularly romantic and picturesque, and interesting for many reasons. This is considered the healthiest and most bracing spot in Mallorca. I can testify to its being so. As we stood upon the high ground outside the monastery, cool breezes blew up from the sea, laden with refreshing, life-giving power. "The very place for A.," we both exclaimed, "if he could only be moved here." But that was beyond the region of possibility.

About us and below us were the grey houses of Valdemosa. A sad, melancholy tone that suggested death and whispered of decay, the changing of all things, the passing of generations, the march of

time; in short all that is painful to short-lived mortality. In the winter we had not visited the monastery. We did so to-day.

I especially wished to make its acquaintance. For me it bore a nameless charm. It was here that, fifty years ago, George Sand had spent a winter, accompanied by her children, and by Chopin. Imagine a man of Chopin's delicate health and sensitive temperament, spending a winter in Mallorca! It was a season of snow and frost, too, as George Sand has recorded. Even to-day, in visiting the island, you have to rough it to some extent: but fifty years ago the life here for a stranger was almost aboriginal. No one wanted him. He was a spy upon the land, like Caleb and Joshua: an intruder,



CLOISTERS OF VALDEMOSA.

who was sent to Coventry. It nearly cost Chopin his life, and no doubt hastened his end.

Of course the monastery is now deserted, as far as monks and midnight masses and religious ordinances are concerned. These all passed away long ago. The building is the sole remaining vestige of what has been. In Mallorca the monks have had their day. What was once devoted to sacred, is now given up to secular uses. The monks have been and are not; but Mallorca has not renounced her religion, and is perhaps more priest-ridden than Spain itself. Nay, very certainly so.

We first entered the church attached to the monastery: an empty building of fine proportions, dimly lighted. Our footsteps echoed under the vaulted roof. At the farther end, behind a screen, was a

harmonium. But it was locked, and the strains we would have upraised remained mute. Perhaps they would have brought forth the shades of dead-and-gone monks, and we might have been very much frightened. No doubt it was all for the best. One's nervous system is not always equal to ghostly receptions.

An opposite door led into the cloisters, ancient, substantial, picturesque, beginning to crumble. The crumbling stage is always the most interesting. They form a small, perfect quadrangle. Running out and away from these cloisters, are long, very long corridors, with vaulted roofs. At the end, looking quite mysterious and far off and poetical, like a distant star, a lantern or rose-window admits a little light upon the scene.

On one side the corridor, large square windows permit a little sunshine to enter, and throw deep lights and shadows upon walls and pavement. Opposite the windows are the doors of the cells. We were admitted to one of them this morning, as, for the time being, it was untenanted. Each block consists of several rooms, large and lofty. These, once inhabited by monks, are now occupied by the people of Palma, who hire them for the year, or for many years, and take refuge from the heat of summer. A whole family will thus migrate, and for many months live in the odour of past sanctity.

This morning the corridor was grey and somewhat gloomy. Very little sunshine entered to cast its shadows and chequer the pavement. Nevertheless, we managed to take a photograph; the first record, I believe, that has ever been taken of this historical corridor. It was the most interesting of all, for it was the one inhabited by George Sand. To me the whole place was full of her presence. I seemed to see her form, and that of the refined, almost effeminate Chopin (surely they ought to have changed places), in all the nooks and crannies of the passage, issuing from all the doorways.

Her apartment was the very last in the corridor, close to the rose-window. Here they spent months of misery and privation; were nearly starved to death; almost perished in the cold of that unusually severe winter. It was impossible to warm those great rooms. People would not wait upon them. It was difficult to obtain fuel. They were treated as heathens by the priest-ridden, superstitious race, because George Sand, on her first appearance, had failed to attend mass. And as the mischief was done, she never went to church at all. With the Mallorcans such a thing as repentance or atonement apparently found no place. So for this neglect they were persecuted. Of course they ought never to have gone there. It was madness. One of George Sand's uncontrollable impulses, carried out without thought, regardless of consequences, but for which the penalty had to be paid. And if Chopin suffered physically, George Sand suffered no less mentally. When she left the island, she shook the dust from her feet, and probably did her best to banish it from her recollection.

But memory is tenacious. Our mistakes, like our sins, rise up in judgment against us. We cannot drink of the waters of oblivion.

I would have given a great deal to examine the apartment she occupied, but it was impossible. Like the harmonium in church, it was locked, and the key had been carried away. Yet I should have liked to tread those boards, once trodden by her, and by the melancholy, dreamy Chopin, whose compositions, somehow or other, always seem to me a paraphrase upon some of her works. As I read them, there is always the undertone of his melodies running through them, clear and distinct ; and I never hear him played without thinking of "Consuelo ;" of "La Petite Fadette," and "François le Champi ;" those pastorals in which she excelled. I do not know wherefore it is that I cannot hear or read the one without thinking of the other. I only know that it is so. "The reason why I cannot tell : I do not like thee, Dr. Fell."

A few old men and women about the place took interest in our proceedings. They had probably never seen a photographic machine before, and seemed to put it down to dealings with the wicked one and the powers of darkness. No doubt it does possess an air of mystery to the unfamiliar. To see a head suddenly disappear under a black cloth looks peculiar and incomprehensible. One ancient dame, however, who walked with a stick, and was bent with age, placed herself in a becoming attitude for being taken, and we motioned to her not to move. She might have been a young and comely creature in the days of George Sand's sojourn in the monastery. It was quite possible that she had seen her, conversed with her, was of the few who had ministered to her. But I could not ask her, and never more regretted the confusion of tongues that followed the downfall of the Tower of Babel.

In those days—not the days of the Tower of Babel, but fifty years ago—George Sand was still young, though not comely. When I knew her in Paris as a boy, she had become old. Her form never graceful, even in youth, was somewhat bent and drooping. She dressed eccentrically, and art lent her no attractions. But her mind was still fresh and vigorous, her eye could still kindle with thought. She possessed the gift of genius, which, with all its penalties, enjoys the prerogative of perpetual mental youth. The body may droop, the silver cord loosen, but the vital spark of the mind burns brightly to the end.

And George Sand, whatever may be said of her life, was a woman of large sympathies and warm heart. She was erratic and eccentric ; sometimes unfeminine ; spasmodic in her moods and emotions ; one moment almost ready for martyrdom ; the next untrue to all that was best within her. But, brought up under unhappy and unhealthy influences ; in an atmosphere that repressed her higher nature ; contracting in early life a marriage that was distasteful and altogether unsuited to her ; living in a country where the higher moral life is

scarcely understood and very little regarded; where religious principle becomes either the superstition and rigidity of the cloister, or, in the opposite extreme, does not exist at all: under these narrowing influences, self-discipline, self-elevation, self-sacrifice, self-repression became impossible with George Sand. To her, these virtues were as unknown quantities. Like another great writer, she somehow missed her way in her youth, and never found it again: perhaps never wished to do so. After a time, the mind sinks into grooves that have grown familiar, and remains therewith content. If the familiar ceases to charm, it also ceases to be strange. But one feels that she must not be judged as we would judge others. Genius is altogether apart from ordinary humanity. It must rise to greater height or sink to lower depths than its fellow mortals, and knows nothing of the dead level of everyday life.

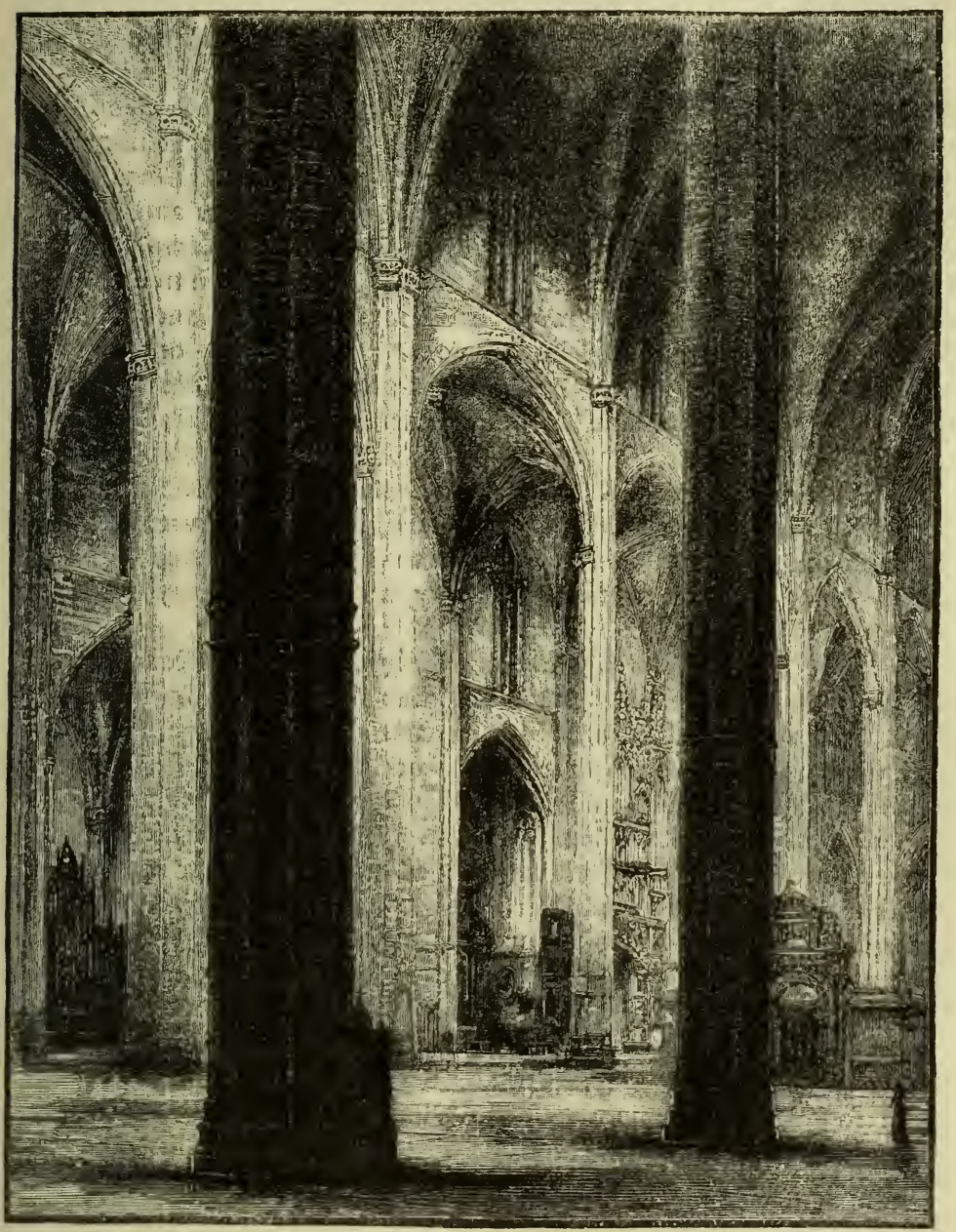
As to her books, I love and admire them. Their tendency is said to be unwholesome; but in that respect she is really beginning to shine by comparison. She wrote as her genius prompted her; from a full heart and brain; never with the intention of merely ministering to the baser passions of the mind. Can as much be said of many writers of the present day?

So, to me, these cloisters and corridors seemed full of the influence of George Sand. A spell was upon me. The words of her novels haunted my brain. The aged face, with its dark flashing eyes and full mouth, as I had known it in Paris, seemed to come between me and every window and every doorway. It seemed to stand out from the centre of the distant lantern, through which she must often have gazed; whilst her form, strange and ghostly, haunted the entrance to her rooms. Chopin's melancholy strains filled the air, and floated through the long, dreamy arches. I could almost hear the murmur of their voices: the one soothing, calming, reassuring, as you would deal with a child; the other, thin, faint, expiring, believing over and over again that his last hour had come, and the melody within him was about to be silenced for ever.

But silenced then it was not. It nearly died, but not quite. For Chopin possessed rallying powers up to a certain point, and in him the vital spark was not so easily quenched. Together they visited Mallorca; together they left it. A little more time was given to him; more melody, wild, inexpressibly melancholy, came from him; and then for him, too, the swan song had been uttered, the silver cord was loosened.

I could have remained here for hours, plunged in delicious reverie. I did remain so long that at last the doctor grew impatient, and declared he would go off without me. To him George Sand was nothing, and Chopin was a mere dreamer of dreams. He was out of tune with them; had no sympathy to give to them. The bent of his mind is strong and practical, as behoves one whose mission in life is to minister the healing art. Therein he excels, and the doers

of this world are never the dreamers. A dreamer may give you a theory; he will not be the one to put it into practice. Chacun à son métier. He who wields the surgeon's knife must have his nerves under control; reason and judgment must go hand in hand.



INTERIOR OF PALMA CATHEDRAL, FROM SOUTH-WEST ANGLE.

Imagination is for others. All the qualifications necessary to his profession the doctor is gifted with. He is in his work heart and soul. Indeed, he now and then indulges me with a graphic description of some past and peculiar case. He shows me what might have been done that would have proved fatal; what was done that restored

health. You would think he was relating some beautiful love story, or touching romance. His tones linger lovingly over details that set me creeping and quivering from head to foot. He has no idea of this ; and when he suddenly turns and sees a white face and horror-stricken eyes, he merely says : "I think the heat is beginning to be too much for you."

But of such stuff as this are doctors made : men, I mean, born to their work ; who rise eventually to the height of their ambition—as Dr. Fitzgilbert will rise some day, if he only possesses ambition, and time should be given to him. But for this very reason he has small sympathy with my very opposite temperament. Dreams and visions, moods and variations, heights of ecstasy or depths of melancholy : these, he considers, shadow forth a mind diseased, and must be treated with strong herbs. Yet it is said, my dear doctor, that you cannot minister to a mind diseased : and as I have already remarked, to one is given the gift of healing, to another the interpretation of tongues : such as translating verses from the Hebrew. Let each follow his bent, and be therewith content.

In spite of dreams and influences, I had no wish to be left to solitude, even in the cloisters haunted by George Sand and Chopin. So when the doctor gave out his awful threat, I came back to earth, said a hasty farewell to the monastery, and followed my arbitrary companion.

We were soon winding round the heights of Valdemosa ; passed the old cross and the fountain where the women had danced round H. C., and released him only after chaste salutations. Alas, to-day they were not washing, so that I had not the pleasure of seeing the doctor treated in the same way. He looked disappointed. The fountain was deserted. Then we began to descend towards Miramar. In due time came the Hospiteria, and all the old familiar scenes.

This was not my first summer visit to Miramar. Only a few days before, I had gone over to call upon the Archduke, and to spend the afternoon with him. On that occasion he told me a singular and very romantic anecdote. Within the week, one morning, he had chanced to come upon a stranger in his grounds. He was a man no longer very young. The Archduke entered into conversation with him : found that he was a great traveller, spoke many languages. In short, he was a man of the world. Then he explained his object in coming to Mallorca.

"I had once a dear friend who belonged to the island. He died lately, and in losing him I lost all I cared for on earth. I wished to do something to perpetuate his memory : not by means of a cold stone monument or a gift to an institution. These ordinary memorials would not satisfy me. They mean nothing ; they are cold and empty. I thought I would try and raise a less silent memorial to my friend. I have come all the way from the Canary Islands for this purpose. I have brought with me a number of canaries, and have set them at

liberty in the grounds of Miramar. You have no canaries in Mallorca; but why should they not live in your beautiful climate as well as elsewhere? At any rate, if they thrive, they will propagate, and their sweet song will be an everlasting chant and requiem to the memory of my dead friend. None shall know him; no other record of him shall appear."

The Archduke, who has much romance in his temperament, was moved by the poetry and beauty of the idea, and by such rare fidelity to the memory of a lost friend. He desired to know the stranger's name.

"Sir," he replied, "permit me to remain unknown. I came to the island yesterday, I depart to-morrow. I wish to leave no trace, no record, behind me of my visit. Let the birds chant my requiem, with that of my lost friend. I still live, it is true, but my happiness at least is dead. It may be that I shall some day return to see the success of my experiment, and then declare myself. But should that day never come, I would rather pass away in silence. My mission here is accomplished."

With a low bow he departed, and Mallorca knows him no more. The little yellow songsters are flying about the woods and lodging in the branches, and one can only hope, with the mysterious stranger, that their reign in the island has taken root, and will not cease.

Reaching the Hospiteria, on the occasion of this first visit, the worthy people had recognised me immediately, and great was their welcome. For my own part I was almost as "emotioned" as they, though outwardly calm. Those three past winter days of absolute happiness came back in all their strength and vividness; the three happiest days, as I have told you, that I had spent in Mallorca. No cloud had dimmed our sky. To-day, I found myself wandering unconsciously upstairs in our old rooms, recalling old impressions. H.C.'s voice and footsteps haunted them. I missed him terribly, just as I had missed him in Barcelona Cathedral. The view from the windows was more glorious than ever; that wonderful combination of blue sea and sky, far stretching wooded heights, fertile terraces of vines and olives; with the intense sunshine over all, golden, molten, glowing.

The people of course asked after H. C. Why had he not also come? Surely we were inseparable, and had no right to appear one without the other? They could not be made to understand that it is not always strife that separateth friends, but what poets would call "the trumpet note of duty."

Nevertheless, though appearing, as it were, single-handed, I was made much of, and received with all the rejoicing given to a lost sheep. But to-day, I had not come to remain. A few hours spent at Miramar, and the lordly barouche would convey me back to Palma.

So was it on the occasion of this second visit. In the meantime the Archduke had left the island; Miramar was deserted. The

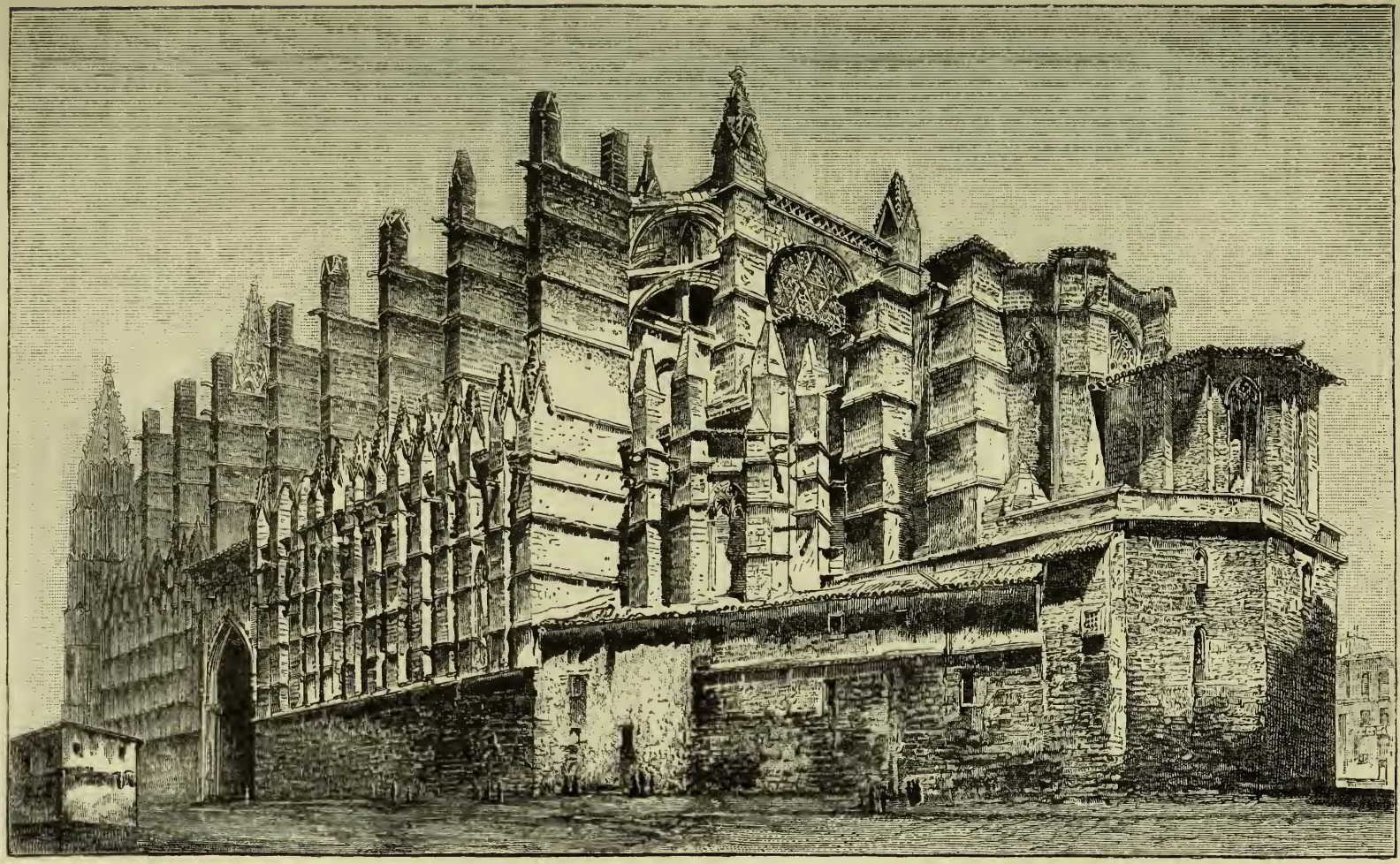
canaries sang, but their most appreciative listener was not there to hear them. To-day, however, we had come for the sake of the drive; to show Dr. Fitzgilbert some of the chief beauties of the island—and of the world. For three things are a spiritual delight: to discourse sweet music to an appreciative ear; to read an exquisite poem to a charmed soul; to share the beauties of nature with one who loves them. Whilst a fourth embodies them all, excels them all: the strength, unity, and immortality of perfect friendship. But this, as Shelley says, is too rare.

Again the guardians of the hospiteria were full of welcome. They are simple, worthy folk; and by a little kindly interest, one had unconsciously made an impression upon them which had survived the test of a six months' absence. They spread our feast and served us to the best of their ability. Even pressed upon us the strong waters of their anisette, at which we were obliged to draw the line. Once we had found a treasure in the old boatman's keg at Manacor, of which H.C. had taken the oyster and left me the shell; but we never found the like again. The anisette of Mallorca is to be avoided. On the other hand, if you only grow used to it, it becomes a snare, though by no means a delusion.

Our frugal repast ended, we went down to Miramar. An old woman insisted upon accompanying us, as if we did not know the way by heart. But from the glances she threw at the doctor, it was evident that she thought if he was not a prince in disguise, he ought to be. Then she sighed frequently, as she remembered the days when she too was young.

Such an old woman! She looked at least a hundred-and-fifty; had the face and expression of an eagle; and in years long past must have been comely. Her eyes were still bright and kindly. Her long grey hair, disturbed by the breeze, gave her an almost wild, witch-like appearance. She went ahead with a firm, vigorous tread: H. C.'s irritating regulation step, with perhaps an inch or two added to it. Her form was upright, almost commanding; her shoulders were square, her back was not bent with age. She would have served for a Mallorcan Joan of Arc; would have looked well at the head of a regiment of soldiers, and have led them on to victory or death. There was power, determination, unflinching purpose in her every line. Her clothes fluttered and flapped in the wind as she walked.

After this description, you will wonder in what way she showed her age. In the extremely lined, withered, and wrinkled appearance of the face; the seams that crossed and criss-crossed each other upon her weather-beaten, time-worn countenance. It is a condition seldom seen except in those who all their days have lived hard lives and fared frugally. And these people in Mallorca exist chiefly upon coarse bread, water and olives, a few beans, a little of the fruits of the earth. Meat is unknown to them; tea, coffee, and milk are equally luxuries to them. Imagine such privation. It needs a happy



EXTERIOR OF PALMA CATHEDRAL, SHOWING SOUTH DOORWAY.

disposition and a glorious climate to make life bearable under such conditions. Fortunately the back is fitted to the burden, and they are contented with their lot.

The doctor was intensely amused at the old woman. She was original and rare, and excited one's interest. I have never seen her equal. It is said that everyone has his double or counterpart in the world, but in this instance I doubt it.

Over the wall she skipped as nimbly as a young fawn; never pausing, never looking back to see if we were following. In truth it was as much as we could do not to lose sight of her, as she plunged into the grounds of Miramar, and rapidly skirted its mazy paths. The birds sang in the trees overhead; canaries, with their bright yellow plumage and glancing wings, chirped, and hardly knew themselves; but of these she took no notice. On she plunged, and on we followed; and the doctor laughed till he cried: and I wondered whether the old woman was the embodiment of perpetual motion.

Arrived at the house, nothing would do but she must conduct us through all the rooms, throw wide the shutters. She was proud of the treasures; far more so, no doubt, than their owner; it was her happiness to display them. To me they were no new scene; but all this was fresh ground to Dr. Fitzgilbert, and he enjoyed the rare collection of curiosities and antiquities.

Her mission over, this singular old woman departed as she had come. We watched her mount the height, firm of foot, fleet of step. Then her fluttering garments plunged into the trees, and we saw her no more.

For ourselves, we spent an hour or two of rare enjoyment: the luxury of doing nothing in the midst of a matchless scene. We threw ourselves at full length upon the grass, under the shadow of the almond trees. Fruit and blossom fluttered and fell about us. The tender cooing of doves could be heard in the distance. Pigeons flashed about the tenement of Miramar, "too sportive to alight." Birds sang in the trees; the quiet, lazy chirp of summer, not the full rich note of spring. Here and there we caught sight of a canary, still shy and strange, but, we hoped, gradually settling down. We mused over the mysterious stranger: the rarity of such friendship; the charm of its existence. Even the doctor grew almost romantic and poetical. We gazed up into the blue of the sky, enjoyed the soothing serenity of the sea, revelled in the glowing sunshine, even in the intense heat. I was plunged in dreams and reveries, and occasionally cast a glance at the doctor to mark the effect of all this charm upon him. I thought that he was really being converted into a "sympathetic soul," who would no longer look upon me as a dreamer of dreams to be ministered unto with the assistance of his Vade Mecum. Hugging myself with this fond belief, my hopes were suddenly dashed to the ground, and I was rudely awakened by the exclamation:

"If we lie here any longer I shall go fast asleep! My pipe's actually out, and I have used my last match!"

Oh, well! The leopard cannot change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin; and you may just as well try to move the world, or arrest the stream of time, as alter a man's nature. You cannot, in these cases, put black for white and white for black, sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet. Perhaps that is one reason why the doctor and I get on excellently well together. We are of those different and very opposite ingredients which yet assimilate: like oil and wine.

After such a rude awakening, so great a shock to one's moral system, there was nothing for it but to abandon the position. It was also time. The sun had long passed the meridian; the afternoon shadows were lengthening. We left the slopes and the almond trees, the cooing doves, the soft plash of the sea, which rippled lazily upon the shore far beneath us. We climbed the steep slopes by the way we had seen the old woman disappear, and presently found ourselves at the Hospiteria. The lordly barouche was awaiting our pleasure. We said good-bye to the worthy folk, and turned our backs upon Miramar, probably for the last time. I may almost venture to say I shall never see it again, but in my memory it dwells for ever.

The homeward drive in the comparative cool of the afternoon was delicious. We were soon skirting the heights of Valdemosa, where the fountain was still deserted, and the ancient cross bore witness to a bygone age of religious fervour. We passed the Monastery, where in the morning I had revelled in dreams of George Sand and exercised the doctor's patience. We did not visit it again. It was all over. Everything passes away. The relentless stream of time swallows up our events in a restless rushing vortex. Nothing pauses. It may be that Childhood and Youth are Vanity, but the season, with its flush of romance, its heyday of sweet and fresh emotions, flies from us almost before we have realised its presence. What says the Eastern proverb? To-day we visit the tomb of our friends, to-morrow other friends visit ours. So the monks of La Trappe, after all, are wise.

The flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow dies;
All that we wish to stay,
Tempts and then flies.
What is this world's delight?
Lightning that mocks the night,
Brief even as bright.

When we entered Palma, and the lordly barouche rattled through its echoing streets, the doctor had lost his fagged and anxious expression. He returned like a lion refreshed, braced with renewed hope, prepared for fresh struggles with an enemy that would not be conquered. It had been a day well spent, perfect in its way; no contretemps to record; no regret to cast its shadow upon the "aftermath" of remembrance.

And now I have a terrible thing to tell you. I had thought to make this my last letter from Mallorca. I must inflict upon you yet one more. The next mail closes in half an hour; I must conclude hastily, and send you yet one more missive from these beautiful shores, this sunny Palma de Mallorca. Tout vient à qui sait attendre. Everything comes to an end. The auctioneer's hammer falls at last. The preacher's three heads and an application; his "finally, my brethren, lastly, and to conclude"—even this yields to a delicious silence and repose. Therefore take heart of grace, and grant me, yet a moment longer, a little more of that patience and kindly hearing wherein alone I have found courage to inflict upon you these records of my sojourn in Mallorca de las Baleares.

Meanwhile, my sister, in the sick-room, all remains doubtful and uncertain.

PRINCESS GOLDENHAIR.

Gossamers a grace shall lend her,
Rainbow gold its tribute render,
  Garlanding her tresses fair—
Sunny woof of silken sheen,
Spun to crown her fairy queen,
  Princess Goldenhair.

Bluer yet than mountain heather,
In the golden summer weather,
  Never eyes serener were
Silver-lit at Cupid's shrine
Into radiance divine,
  Princess Goldenhair.

Though in tropic isles the fairest
Passion-flowers of Nature's rarest,
  Woo the otto-scented air,
None hath rarer grace than she,
In her sweet simplicity,
  Princess Goldenhair.

Blushes from a world of posies
Ruby red with summer roses,
  Colour-bright in beauty rare
All her pretty lips outvie,
So she love me, what care I?
  Princess Goldenhair.

THE DIAMOND BRACELETS

MRS. MORTON DEWSBURY has been for the last ten years, and is still, a prominent feature in a certain class of London society. Not on account of her personal attractions, for she is well on the shady side of forty, and dumpy in figure. Nor because she has any claim to patrician descent: all that is known of her antecedents, previous to her marriage with the junior partner of the city firm of Isaacson and Dewsbury, being the uncontradicted rumour that she originally bore the name of Miggs. Notwithstanding these evident drawbacks, however, she has succeeded in attaining the one object of her ambition—notoriety. And this not by any intellectual acuteness of her own—for a vainer or more frivolous creature never existed—but simply owing to the paternal foresight of the departed Miggs, who, whatever his calling may have been, had contrived to extract from it a fortune of three hundred thousand pounds, every penny of which was left by him at his daughter's disposal.

Morton Dewsbury, with whose firm the old gentleman had had frequent dealings, was shrewd enough to offer his services to the heiress for the advantageous investment of her money; and in little more than a year after her father's death, the announcement of their approaching union surprised nobody. The lease of a huge barrack-like mansion in Mayfair having been purchased, the "happy pair" established themselves in their new abode. Before many months had elapsed, plenty of people were found willing to overlook the fact of their being parvenus, and perfectly ready to partake, without the slightest compunction, of dinners served up by one of the first "chefs" in London.

Eighteen hundred and eighty-seven, as all the world knows, was the Jubilee year, and London became for the time being cosmopolitan. Foreign potentates of every grade flocked thither with one accord, leaving their subjects for the nonce to take care of themselves. In order to compete with the innumerable festivities, public and private, the theatres put forth attractive programmes. Among others the Italian Opera—whether with the aid of Patti or Albani is now immaterial—announced an extra night, on which occasion many of the illustrious visitors had signified their intention of being present. Mrs. Morton Dewsbury was the last woman in the world to let slip such an opportunity of seeing and being seen, and by her directions a centre box on the grand tier was secured for the evening in question.

"I shall wear my diamonds to-night, Morton," she said to her husband, while they were dawdling over a tête-à-tête breakfast.

"If you take my advice," replied Mr. Dewsbury, putting down the

Times, "you will do nothing of the kind. Why, you would be stared at by the whole house!"

"Well," she retorted petulantly, "what does that matter? There is no use in having pretty things if they are never seen. At all events, I shall wear the bracelets."

This compromise appearing to satisfy her liege lord, the latter resumed his reading, while the lady retired to meditate on the selection of a toilette.

On their arrival at the theatre, shortly after the rising of the curtain, hardly a seat was vacant. From their "coign of vantage" they at once discovered that one of the stage-boxes was occupied by the Princess de —— and her suite, and the other by a group of Oriental dignitaries in their national costume, and resplendent with jewels. A second glance round the house agreeably convinced Mrs. Morton Dewsbury, from the opera glasses directed towards her box, that her two bracelets, exactly alike, the centre-piece of each of which was a magnificent diamond surrounded by smaller stones, attracted general notice; so that the good lady was in a state of pleasurable excitement and gratified vanity.

Her crowning triumph, however, was yet to come. A few minutes after the termination of the first act, the door of her box was opened to give admittance to an irreproachably-attired visitor, whom neither Mrs. Dewsbury nor her husband recollected to have seen before.

"I have to apologise, Madame," said the stranger, with a slight foreign accent, "for this unauthorised intrusion; but I come as an ambassador, and these are my credentials," handing to the lady, as he spoke, a card, on which was inscribed—

"Le Comte de Lansberg.
Chambellan de S. A. sérénissime la Princesse de ——"

"My errand," he continued, "will doubtless appear to you a very singular one, but I trust to your indulgence to excuse the infraction of etiquette of which I am unavoidably guilty. My august mistress, who is sitting yonder,"—here he pointed to the stage box—"is passionately fond of diamonds, and for the last hour has been so struck by the brilliancy of those you are wearing, that she has commissioned me to solicit the favour of being allowed to examine them more closely. May I therefore entreat your permission to gratify the Princess's curiosity by entrusting to me one of your bracelets, which shall be safely returned to you?"

Intensely flattered by this courteously-worded request, Mrs. Morton Dewsbury at once unclasped the ornament, and with a gracious smile delivered it to the Count, who, with reiterated apologies, withdrew.

He had not been long gone, when Percy Warrington, a young clerk of the Foreign Office, and a frequent visitor at the house in Mayfair, entered the box, and was naturally regaled with a full

account of what had happened, accompanied by a somewhat ostentatious display of the stranger's card.

"Ah, Lansberg," he said, after glancing at the address. "I know him; he is an honorary member of my club, and a capital old fellow into the bargain."

"Not old," corrected Mrs. Dewsbury. "Five-and-thirty to forty at most, I should imagine."

"He would be charmed to hear you say so," replied Percy. "Why, my dear Mrs. Dewsbury, Lansberg is sixty if he is a day. Besides, his English is a 'caution!'"

"And this fellow, barring a touch of accent, spoke as well as you or I do," said Morton, fidgeting angrily on his chair. "But I should know him again among a thousand, and when I ——"

"Stay," suddenly interrupted the young man: "I will make sure of one thing, at all events." And, without further explanation, he left the box, but re-appeared in a few minutes with an unusually serious air.

"I'm afraid it is a bad business," he said. "I have been questioning the box-keeper round the corner, who positively declares that no one has come out of the stage-box since the performance began."

"That settles the matter," said Dewsbury. "I shall go at once to Scotland Yard, and set the police at work. I suppose," he added, addressing his wife, "you have no wish to remain here any longer?"

"Oh, no," answered poor Mrs. Dewsbury, whose spirits during the last quarter of an hour had sunk down to zero. "But you forget that the carriage is only ordered at eleven."

"That needn't hinder you in the least," interposed the good-natured Percy Warrington, "if for once in a way you will accept my escort in a modest 'four-wheeler.' Shall I have one called?"

"I shall be very glad," she replied, taking her husband's arm; "for this annoying occurrence has quite upset me."

On returning home, Morton related to his wife his interview with the inspector on duty, who had held out some hope of recovering the stolen bracelet, but was clearly of opinion that the robbery had been premeditated, and that more than one person was concerned in it. "I told him the whole story, and gave him a full description of the stones and mounting," pursued Mr. Dewsbury, "and he noted down every particular, and promised that one of the cleverest detectives in the force should devote himself exclusively to the case. I instructed him, of course, to spare no expense, and it was agreed that he should let me know the result to-morrow evening."

They were still conversing, when a ring was heard at the door, and a servant presently announced "Mr. Burtenshaw," from Scotland Yard, followed by the entrance of a short, wiry-looking personage, with sharp peering eyes and a closely-cropped head.

"The detective, no doubt," thought Morton, as he courteously returned the new-comer's salutation, and requested him to be seated.

"I have taken the liberty to call, sir," began Mr. Burtenshaw, "about your good lady's bracelet. I always like in these matters to get my information first-hand; it saves a deal of trouble, and when I can put this and that together, a trifle sometimes makes all the difference."

"True," assented Morton; "but I hardly see what particulars I can give you, beyond those your inspector knows already."

"That's just where you are wrong, sir, if you will excuse my saying so," replied Mr. Burtenshaw. "When I took the office, and got the heads of the story from my chief, there was one point in it which struck me as being the keystone of the whole affair. From what I gather, there is a second bracelet exactly similar to the one we are on the look-out for. Now, if I could only see that for a moment, it would help me more than all the descriptions in the world."

"Nothing easier," said Dewsbury. "My wife has it on her arm still, and you can examine it as long as you please."

"Certainly," chimed in the lady, who by this time had partially recovered her usual cheerfulness. Unfastening the desired object, she handed it to the detective, who inspected it minutely, but with an evidently disappointed air.

"The stones are wonderfully fine," he muttered, half aloud; "especially the centre one; but the design of the setting might be more original, instead of what we call the regulation pattern. It would be next to impossible, except for the diamonds, to distinguish a bracelet like this from a dozen others, unless we could light on the exact fellow to it; and, to do that, we must have this one in our hands for a few days. It is our only chance."

"Do you mean to say," inquired Morton, who had overheard the colloquy, "that one would enable you to discover the other?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Burtenshaw, in a confident tone. "All we require is the test of comparison, and if the lady doesn't object ——"

"Not in the least," said Mrs. Dewsbury, after a moment's consultation with her husband. "It will be as safe with you as with me."

"Safer, perhaps," observed the detective, carefully depositing the case containing the bracelet in his breast-pocket, and taking up his hat to depart. "If the other is where I strongly suspect it ought to be, you will see them both again before the week is out."

On the following evening, punctual to his appointment, the inspector arrived, and produced a copy of the handbill, which had been widely circulated throughout the city, offering a reward of five hundred pounds for the recovery of the stolen bracelet.

"We can do no more at present," he said, "until we receive our

reports; but no time has been lost, and I am inclined to think we are on the right track. It is perfectly clear to me that we have to deal with accomplished swindlers, clever enough to assume any disguise without fear of detection. It was well known that the Princess intended to be present at last night's performance, and they, doubtless, laid their plans accordingly, contriving, as a necessary precaution, and probably by the aid of a light-fingered confederate, to obtain possession of the card-case of one of her suite. This done, they had only to select their victim; and as your diamonds, madam," he added, turning to Mrs. Dewsbury, "were, by all accounts, more conspicuous by their brilliancy than any in the house, it is not surprising that they should have given you the preference. However, I hope to have them yet, for the man I have put on the job is a sharp fellow, and knows his business."

"Yes," remarked Morton, "he seems intelligent enough."

The inspector looked puzzled. "You have seen Duckett, then?" he asked.

"Duckett? No, but Burtenshaw. You sent him here last night, half an hour after I had left you."

"My dear sir," replied the official, "we are playing at cross-purposes. I never sent anyone, and there is no such person as Burtenshaw in Scotland Yard."

"Oh, you must know him," persisted Morton. "A little man, with very short hair and remarkably keen eyes."

"Never saw or heard of him in my life," was the unexpected answer. "What did he come for?"

"He wanted to see the other bracelet," interposed Mrs. Dewsbury, "and said it was a pity he couldn't take it with him for a few days to compare it with the one that was stolen. So, as I believed he came from you, I let him have it."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed the inspector, forgetting his habitual politeness in his indignation at the trick played on him. "Then, madam, I am afraid the game is up. As long as these rascals had only one of the bracelets in their hands, there was always the chance that it might have remained intact, or that an accomplice, tempted by the high reward offered, might have 'split' on the others. But, now that they have got both, I wouldn't mind wagering that the gold is already in the melting pot, and the diamonds are on their way to Antwerp or Amsterdam."

Apparently, the wager would have been a safe one; for, although a considerable time has elapsed since the gala night at the opera, Mrs. Morton Dewsbury has never heard any further tidings of the purloined bracelets. And as Mr. Duckett pithily observed, when the pros and cons of the case were laid before him, it is "all Lombard Street to a China orange" that she never will.

CHARLES HERVEY.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

AN EVENTFUL JOURNEY TO ROME.

By Keeley Halswelle, R.I., A.R.S.A.

IT was my third visit to Italy, and the journey proved a very eventful one.

We were snowed up on the top of Mont Cenis for eighteen hours in Refuge No. 2. Fancy spending our Christmas Day upon the summit of the Alps, huddled together in a wooden shed, blocked in with deep snow; nothing to eat, the thermometer below zero, very little fuel, and every prospect of remaining there for an indefinite period.

But not to anticipate. My wife and I left London on the evening of the 23rd of December, 1869, accompanied by Mr. Goodall, and our adventures began in leaving Dover by the Calais boat.

I had noticed in Oxford Circus, that afternoon, bits of paper and the debris of the gutters eddying in circles at the corners of the streets. Former experience had taught me that this was an infallible sign of boisterous weather in the Channel. However, a young middy, one of our fellow-passengers in the train, assured us that in his opinion it would be simply a fresh breeze, rather pleasant than otherwise. But on arriving at Dover we found the night so terribly rough that we had great difficulty in embarking, even under the shelter of the pier, and on getting outside, the sea was terrific.

After struggling across, we were obliged to beat about off Calais for two hours, unable to make the harbour from the fury of the sea; and at length, when the captain did venture to enter, the steamer struck the pier with great violence. The first thing we heard was the sudden shock followed by a deluge upon deck, which, pouring down the cabin stairs, spread over the floor of the saloon, already covered with some inches of water. A sudden panic was the result: men prostrate a moment before rushed blindly "en masse" to gain the deck. I was knocked down and trampled upon, and for some minutes the greatest excitement and confusion prevailed. At length we got ashore safely, but drenched to the skin and very cold and miserable.

The French boat did not cross, and we heard afterwards that three ships were wrecked that night in the Channel.

To pass quickly over that portion of our journey unproductive of incident, I come to our second misadventure. We arrived in Paris very late, of course, barely giving us time for a wash and breakfast

before starting by the eleven o'clock express for Macon. There we enjoyed a good supper and some excellent wine in a little inn near the station; and, better still, obtained six hours' sleep in bed—the only time we were between the sheets until our arrival in Rome.

Leaving Macon at six in the morning, we began the ascent of the mountain from San Michel about three in the afternoon. At that period, before the tunnel was made, a single line on a novel principle, called Fell's Railway, crossed Mont Cenis.

Our train consisted of one first-class saloon carriage only; and we numbered fourteen passengers, ourselves being the only English.

There was not a great deal of snow on the French side of the pass, and everything went well at the beginning. It was dark before we arrived at the Grande Croix, the last station near the summit. We had some hot wine there, and felt very comfortable, little dreaming what was in store for us. But soon after, we perceived the engine had some difficulty in forcing its way through the snow, and occasionally came to a full stop. However, we still forced ahead, although slowly, not anticipating anything of a serious nature. We were congratulating ourselves that the worst was probably over, and that we should descend the mountain safely, when suddenly the engine ran into five feet of snow, half burying the train behind it.

Two of the guards entered the carriage, bringing with them a shower of drift, which covered us with minute particles of ice. They announced the impossibility of proceeding further.

"But what are we to do?" we cried.

"Chi lo sa?" and a shrug of the shoulders was all the answer we received. The engine was embedded in the snow (which was rapidly extinguishing the fires) and could not move either way. To stay in the carriage was out of the question. The hot water in the foot-pans would shortly become lumps of ice, and the wind was drifting the snow in such quantities as to make it extremely likely that our fate was to be buried alive. I went outside the carriage door for a moment, to see for myself the aspect of affairs, but was up to the middle in snow directly I stepped from the footboard, and the cold was so intense that I could scarcely face the wind and drift even for a few moments. Fortunately for us, the train had been stopped near Refuge No. 2; and after some delay (my wife being carried by the driver of the engine, who, curiously enough, proved to be a Scotchman, from Edinburgh) we all got safely housed within a hut about twelve feet square.

A small stove was placed near the centre of the room, in which we quickly lit a fire and made a circle round it, discussing our prospects, and the necessity of breaking up the few benches and stools which comprised the sole furniture of the Refuge, in the event of our small supply of wood failing.

In this wretched hut, with the temperature outside far below zero, we spent eighteen hours without food. Luckily I had plenty of

tobacco, which was freely distributed. I had also a flask of Scotch whisky.

I passed the night, in common with the others, on the bare earthen floor. But fortunately, with the aid of our friend the Scotsman and a nip of whisky, I obtained the cushions from the carriage, and utilised them in making up a bed for my wife.

The next morning (Christmas Day) an essay of one of our fellow-voyageurs—a young Frenchman, of very poor physique—nearly led to a fatal termination. He had announced his intention of trying to descend the mountain to San Martino, but had not ventured more than two hundred yards from the Refuge when he was unable to go forward or return. Had not my wife observed him from the little window, staggering and tossing his arms in a curious way, and apparently trying to attract attention by shouting—although no sound came from his lips—he would certainly have been lost.

As it was, we had some difficulty in bringing him back to the hut, owing to the intense cold and wind. He told me subsequently—after being restored to consciousness with the aid of our Scotch whisky—that the intense cold had suddenly deprived him of all strength. The snow appeared to turn a brilliant orange colour. He tried to attract the attention of those in the hut, but was unable to utter a sound, and finally fell down in the snow unconscious. His appearance was ghastly when rescued, but some vigorous rubbing and a little spirit soon brought him round.

This incident caused some excitement amongst our party, besides showing us the impossibility of getting away without aid; and our spirits were not by any means raised by the assurance of the guards that we might have to remain several days in our present position.

The morning was wonderfully clear and bright with a brilliant sun, and the effect of light and shade on the solitary mountain gorges so magnificent, that, although we were not in the best frame of mind for appreciating the beauties of nature, all felt the extreme grandeur and solemnity of the scene.

But all feelings of sentiment quickly gave way to one of eager and unexpected satisfaction, when some twenty muleteers, with sledges, suddenly appeared in sight, on their way to release us. The arrival of these men over the snow formed a perfect picture, and one I shall not readily forget. They wore long woollen coats, tied round the waist, each with hoods, leaving but a small portion of the face visible; their legs were cased in thick rolls of flannel; bags of skin, with the fur inside, did duty for gloves. As they came towards us, their breath steaming in the frosty air and forming icicles on their moustaches and beards, their stalwart appearance elicited a cheer and a shout of welcome as they entered the Refuge.

An hour or so afterwards we found ourselves at San Martino, where a train was waiting to convey us to Susa.

AN INHERITED HUSBAND.

By Mary Mudie.

I.

"MANY happy returns of the day!" said Mrs. Trench to her sister Grace, giving her wishes with a warmth so contrary to her usual calm manner that it was evidently a special occasion. Mrs. Trench was a bride of some six months' standing, and, since the death of their grandfather, Grace's home had been her sister's house, a beautiful old palace in Venice.

"Don't, Edith!" answered Grace, turning from the contemplation of the Grand Canal. "Pray don't wish me anything of the kind."

"My dear, you don't suppose I want you to die?"

"No, of course not; and I don't want to die either. But your voice sounded absolutely congratulatory."

"And why not? Are you not of age? And have you not come into a fortune and a husband on the same day?"

Grace Davenport threw her hands up and then clasped them together. "That is just it; a husband! Whoever heard of such a thing out of a story! To inherit a husband!"

"My dear Grace, why excite yourself all over again about a fact which you have known for four months, and which cannot be helped?" suggested Mrs. Trench, whose policy had ever been to conceal how much she felt for her.

"It's easy for you to preach good sense, Edith. When the half of grandpapa's fortune came to you, you were just safely married; so he could not clog it with so ridiculous, so monstrous a condition. But—but—what in the name of all that's—amazing could have made him do such a thing for me?"

"He hoped no doubt to provide you with a good husband."

"And had I no chance of finding one for myself?" Grace's indignation was very natural, for she was a very pretty girl.

"You are not looking at the matter from a right point of view. Grandpapa loved you very dearly, as he seems also to have loved Richard Barton; his wish that the two he loved best should belong to one another is sufficiently plain."

"But no one's wishes, however kindly meant, can influence such matters. I may have it in me to make some man a tolerable wife, as I daresay Richard Barton has it in him to make an excellent husband; but that does not necessarily mean that we should suit each other. Suppose, for instance, that he has seen some other woman whom he would prefer?" And Grace turned pale at the bare idea.

"I think you are supposing grandpapa's great favourite to be a bad

man. No doubt a man of five-and-thirty or thereabouts has had time to single out someone whom he would like to marry; but had it been so he would have told grandpapa of it."

"But since his death, Edith?—A few months are quite long enough to ——"

"Then I repeat that in that case he is no good man."

"No, Edith; you don't see it as clearly as I do. He *could* like someone else, and yet be obliged to marry *me!* He is no longer a free agent. If he attempts to do right in one way he does wrong in another. If he pleases himself, he robs me. The position is a deadlock."

How often had Mrs. Trench gone over the same arguments! She revered her grandfather's memory too much to blame him; yet she was seriously uneasy, and longed to know personally something of this Mr. Barton. Unfortunately, just as she and her husband were to start for England, after their wedding tour, he contracted a bad cold and was forbidden to leave the warmer climate for some months.

"You know, Grace ——" she began slowly.

"It's no use, Edith. It can't be helped, and even if we hate the sight of each other ——"

"That's nonsense, Grace! he is not in the least likely to hate the sight of you."

"That depends upon his taste; and as for mine—perhaps he wears a wig and spectacles!"

Mrs. Trench gladly hailed her change of tone, and laughed as she said: "We know better than that. Did not Charlie find out that he was an active, professional man. He is not Methuselah, though he is older than you."

"I know. But that is not everything. Just think, Edith, how many sorts of men there are whom one would *not* like for a husband. He might be red-haired and coarse-looking—he might be small and sleek and priggish—he might be as stout as Daniel Lambert, or have a nose like Punch. And then he may be jealous or tyrannical, or a mean and sordid wretch who got round dear grandpapa."

Mrs. Trench tried to stop her, but in vain, for the girl was talking with excitement. Yet, could she herself in all honesty have said that there was not a possibility of truth in her exaggerated words? While she was thinking of the best thing to say, she observed with relief and pleasure that Grace had taken unusual pains to make her sober dress look attractive.

"That's pretty, Grace. Have I seen that dress before?" Grace coloured and laughed ever so little, too.

"Of course I have tried to make the best of myself. I hate the very thought of him, and when he comes and introduces himself today, I daresay I shall not be even civil to him. But he may as well think the best of his future wife. Good Heavens, Edith! what is he likely to do? and what shall I do?"

"Wait till he comes; I never knew your wits fail you yet."

But though they did wait with all the calmness they could command, the day dragged itself nearly into evening, and no Richard Barton had appeared. As he lived in England, there was of course always a probability that, with the best intentions, he might fail to arrive and make the acquaintance of his future wife precisely on her twenty-first birthday. That they should meet on that day had been a stipulation in old Mr. Davenport's will; and so entirely had they expected to see him that the sisters waited and waited for him until his non-arrival made them nervous and anxious.

At last a welcome diversion came in the form of the post. There were several letters for Mrs. Trench, but only one, in a strange handwriting, for Grace, who, still expecting to see this inherited husband in bodily shape, opened it without any suspicion.

"What good writing!" Then she gave a shriek. "From Richard Barton!"

Edith sprang up, but Grace waved her off, and with burning cheeks devoured its contents. Her sister watched her face and saw it change curiously. It ran thus:—

"My dear Miss Davenport,—The 15th of this month has always been the day fixed for a meeting between you and myself. I have, however, ventured to address you by letter instead, feeling little doubt that such a course will be the more agreeable to you. I have always wished before any personal interview took place, to tell you exactly what I think and feel as to the terms of your grandfather's will. Much as I loved Mr. Davenport and revere his memory, that will is, to my mind, in the highest degree unjust to you. I am in no way connected with you, and yet unless you agree to share with me that which is by every right yours, you lose your inheritance. If you had been bidden to relinquish to me the half of the £50,000 it would have been hard enough; but that you should lose the whole unless you marry me is a condition to express my opinion of which I can find no words. I, naturally, only feel myself honoured by your grandfather's desire to entrust your happiness to my care; but to you such a prospect must be most undesirable. I am perfectly heart-free and have arrived at that time of life when the thoughts of a wife and home become dear to a man. But you are still very young, and it may even be that your affections are already engaged. I beg you then to tell me, as unreservedly as you would to an old and dear friend, what are your wishes and feelings in this matter. Did I know you to be penniless I might have written differently, but fortunately your means, though limited, need not drive you to a worldly marriage; and you will at least know that the poor and the suffering will be the gainers by what might only have brought doubtful happiness to yourself. I need say nothing of that deserving institution, the Orphan Asylum at L——, to which the fortune is to go if we forfeit it. One word

more and I have done. If you already love, I have no fear that you will not tell me so. But if you have only a rooted dislike to a ready-made husband, say so frankly. Yet, if you can persuade yourself to it, give me at least a chance of overcoming that very natural dislike. If I fail, I alone shall suffer.

"Very sincerely yours,

"RICHARD BARTON."

When Mrs. Trench finished the letter, she looked up, and found Grace watching her. The girl sprang forward, and, throwing herself down beside her sister, hid her face in her hands; but Mrs. Trench could not tell whether it was tears or laughter that moved her so much.

"You see, dear, you have only, after all, been making a bugbear for yourself," she said, herself much moved by the unexpected tenor of that letter. Grace lifted her head and laughed an odd, broken laugh, very near tears. She had conjured up such terrible images, and now there seemed every chance of salvation.

"Oh, Edith," she said, still between tears and laughter, "he must have the wig and spectacles after all. It is such a kind, good letter —he must be all heart, but nothing else besides."

"Come now, do you want me to give you moral sayings, and tell you that the outside is nothing?" said Mrs. Trench, smoothing the girl's ruffled hair.

"He must be a sort of Pecksniff to look at," she went on recklessly; "with a long face, and head shaped like a pear—always wearing a tail-coat and white choker. Edith, you don't admire the picture of your future brother-in-law!"

"I confess I did not see it in his letter. Suppose you read it over again."

The practical suggestion sobered Grace, and seating herself at the writing-table, she said:

"Do you notice that he says nothing about himself in connection with the money? Do you think he is a rich man, or only a disinterested one?"

"Both, perhaps. Even rich people don't despise a second fortune. I know I did not."

Grace made no further remarks, but, dipping the pen in the ink, wrote the following answer.

"DEAR MR. BARTON,—I thank you extremely for your letter, with all its sympathy and kindly thought for me. I am like yourself, free to make a choice, and my prejudice against a ready-made husband is only prejudice. Grandpapa must have meant kindly by me, and so it seems to me that we ought, at least, to try to do as he wished. If it should end in the fortune going to the charity, I shall have, as you rightly remark, sufficient for independence; and I must

presume, as you do not speak of yourself, that your circumstances and future prospects are satisfactory. I hope that it may be so.

"Yours very sincerely,

"GRACE DAVENPORT."

II.

A FEW days later, Grace Davenport spent one afternoon and part of an evening with some friends on the Lido. Being a long-standing engagement, she was obliged to keep it; but she left her friends early, for her sister had one of her receptions, for which the Palazzo Trench was rather famous.

Grace obeyed her sister's injunctions not to be late, and so she was coming home in the gondola of one of her friends, just as the sun had set. The sky presented a picture such as can only be seen in Venice. The sunset had left a lingering warmth of colour behind it. In a few moments the glow faded, and, from the absence of twilight, in an incredibly short space of time the first pale gleams of moonlight were seen, and the eye accustomed to gaze overhead could have perceived at least one star beginning to glimmer in the paling sky.

The soft colours seemed just suited to the little quiet figure lying so lightly back against the gay cushions of the gondola. She was a very pretty girl, with a pale, dark skin and large brown eyes, and abundant waving hair a shade lighter than her eyes. Her features were regular, and her expression spirited yet gentle. She looked very well that night in her soft, black dress. On her head she had fastened with a white rose a black lace veil, which she had learnt to wear as only an Italian or Spaniard can wear that most becoming adornment.

She was deep in thought, for the letter which she had received and her answer to it had changed the whole current of her life. Outwardly, everything was as before; but how different she felt! Of her own free will had she asked this man, the very thought of whom she had hated, to come and try to overcome her prejudices!

At that moment the gondola was skirting the island of S. Lazzaro, and Grace was gazing absently at the low mass of buildings of the Armenian Convent, beginning to show clearly in the white light of the moon. She therefore did not notice that a gondola was swiftly approaching her until she heard the sudden rush of water against the oar which told her that a boat was coming to a standstill, managed as only a Venetian gondolier can do it. A second rush of water was heard, and Grace's boat stopped also. To the girl's amazement she saw that the gondola meeting her contained her brother-in-law, who ought to have been receiving his guests, and a strange gentleman.

"Well met, Grace," cried Charlie Trench, speaking as if he were out of breath. "I thought I should catch you just here. I must be off immediately; but Barton has only a few hours to stay, so just show

him as much of Venice as you can, there's a dear girl. You could not have a better cicerone, Barton. She doesn't go in for enthusiasm, but she knows every stone as well as Ruskin himself."

Mr. Barton was by this time standing up and looking at Grace, who, as startled by this unexpected meeting as if she had seen some supernatural apparition, could neither speak nor move. The gondoliers were holding the boats together, and Mr. Trench was growing impatient. He was not thinking of his guests, for his wife was well able to do without him, but he felt instinctively that this moment was the crisis in this strange affair.

"If Miss Davenport will be so kind," said Richard Barton.

The words were nothing out of the common, but the voice and intonation seemed to have the power to help her suddenly to come to life. She said nothing, but unconsciously she must have looked her assent, for the next instant Richard Barton had stepped into her gondola, Mr. Trench had wished them "Buon divertimento," and his gondola had turned and shot round the island.

Grace Davenport suddenly sat up on her cushions, while Richard Barton seated himself on one of the side seats, and, in that brief moment, the two made up their minds about each other. "What a pretty girl! with just my favourite brown eyes. Faithful and true. If I can win such a wife I'd like to send the fortune to the charity as a thank-offering," was his comment. And hers:

"What a good-looking man! and what keen yet pleasant eyes."

And the mutual satisfaction showing itself, unknown to them, in their faces, made them both break out into a smile.

"We have not been introduced in the orthodox fashion," said he. "But as Mr. Trench called you Grace," pronouncing the name as if he liked it, "I take it for granted you are my correspondent."

"And you mine," and simultaneously their hands went out, and a cordial shake followed. All her horrible fears had vanished magically.

"You want to get some impression of Venice?" she said. "You could not have chosen a better moment than by moonlight."

"I am quite sure I am in the greatest luck," he returned; a quick smile lighting up his face as a flash of lightning does a landscape, revealing much that had before been hidden.

"He is more than good-looking," thought Grace, with vague uneasiness mixed with her relief; "a man like that would give his wife plenty of cause for jealousy."

"In fact, I think," he added, "that I am generally lucky in most things, and have grown to expect to get all I want."

"That means, I suppose, that your good luck is yourself. People who know what they want, generally succeed in getting it," remarked Grace, feeling as if someone else were speaking for her.

"Is that your experience?" he asked, looking rather searchingly at her.

Grace shook her head and did not commit herself to words. This

moonlight run must surely be a dream, and this was no real flesh and blood Richard Barton who was asking her if life had realised her aims!

"That poor girl," he thought, "has been made to suffer cruelly by this will." "You are too young to have had much experience yet," he said very gently, aloud; "but I hope," and he put the heartiest good-will in that word, "that one day you will be able to say that life has answered your expectations."

After this there came a little awkward pause in their conversation. Grace felt her cheeks slightly reddening, and she was glad that the sound of the voices of some gondoliers singing to a guitar accompaniment reached them at that moment.

"Hark!" she said.

"Now, such sounds as those," he remarked, when the music had ceased, "make one understand how a man could gradually have all his energies lulled to sleep."

Grace gave a merry laugh.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because that man would never be you, Mr. Barton."

"How can you tell in so short a time?"

"The very fact that you have been able, during the music, to analyse its possible effects would be enough, without the expression of your face and attitude."

"How did I look?"

"As if you could hear with your eyes as well as your ears."

"And my attitude?"

"I hardly know, but I think you have a journey on your mind; I know that I can never take my ease at such a moment."

"No?" he said, much amused at her observations. "Yet when Trench and I came up, you looked the very impersonation of calm repose. Have you two sides to your character?"

"No," she replied, smiling. "Only you know there is a time for all things, and a solitary row in a gondola is not a moment for the display of much energy."

"Your answer," he said, laughing, "is as unanswerable as your description of my attitude is true. I have a journey on my mind, and a long one. I am on my way to India."

Grace, with all a woman's inconsistency, immediately belied her own words by sitting suddenly upright and looking anything but calmly reposing.

"To India!" she said; then she suddenly coloured at the dismay she detected in the sound of her own voice. "Pray excuse my surprise. I do not know much about you, but I thought that if I did know anything, it was that you lived in England."

"I live where my work is. I am an engineer. At this moment it happens to be in India, last year it was in Canada, and the year before in Australia."

"And of course you like rushing about in that way?"

"Oh, yes; everyone likes variety, and I do with the rest, and perhaps better. I have no ties, you know, of any kind—no one to miss me when I am gone, or to trouble themselves about a deferred return."

Richard Barton was too clever a man to be cunning, yet that was a wily speech.

"I think you must be unjust to your friends," she said, all her tender woman's soul shining in her brown eyes.

"My friends are busy men like myself. It is only women, or the aged, whose working days are over, who have time to think of the absent."

"You loved my grandfather?" she asked quickly, feeling no regret, however, that he stood so alone.

"Yes. Life has never been quite the same to me since he died."

They were approaching the Piazzetta, the lights of which they had long seen in the distance, and over the water there again came the sound of music—not of men's voices this time, but of a well-conducted brass band.

"What an enchanted place this is," he said. "I danced to that very waltz of Strauss's last week, and now it seems positive vulgarity to think of ever doing anything but glide in a gondola to its rhythm."

"I see you will carry away the best impression of Venice," she said, smiling. "Its variety and its mystery. Its colour and life you cannot see."

"That must be for another visit. In the meanwhile, pray don't dissipate the mystery. I am half afraid of asking you to get out and walk."

"I shall not vanish, I assure you."

"If you can promise, I should like a nearer inspection of the Piazza and those columns and colonnades."

They were just at the Ponte della Paglia, and at a sign from Grace the gondoliers turned the boat and shot it under the arch. The next moment the gondola stood still on the further side of the Bridge of Sighs. The light of the moon had not yet penetrated into the narrow canal, so that the boat and its occupants seemed swallowed up in its gloom, and as if the shadow of the bridge trod by the feet of the doomed was upon them. It was so dark that they could only dimly see each other's faces; yet, looking through the arch of the Ponte della Paglia, the water beyond was a gleaming sheet of silver, and that fatal bridge suspended in mid-air stood out black and lowering against the moonlit sky.

"Miss Davenport," said Richard Barton, after a few moments of silence between them, and unconsciously lowering his voice: "You have begun at the wrong end. What can you offer me more thrilling than this?"

Grace smiled, though she whispered too.

"I was afraid Strauss was perhaps too modern."

As she spoke, two or three splashes as of some small body falling into the water were distinctly heard.

"Did you hear that?" he said. "Can there be fish in these little black canals?"

"Those are the rats, which are happily the only occupants of the pozzi now. Who knows whether, if they could speak, we should not discover that their ancestors were the petted and welcome companions of the poor wretches once confined there?"

He smiled at her in answer, and then looked up at the dark bridge. "I expect," he said, "to see many wonderful sights and to receive many strange impressions in the next few months, but I shall not surpass this."

The gondola was in the meanwhile gliding into the open, and in a moment they were in the thick of other gondolas, and merry voices were heard in every civilised language. The gloom had vanished, and another Venetian picture had taken its place. They landed at the Piazzetta, and when Grace had sent back the boat, she and Richard Barton instinctively stopped and looked at each other.

"You are taller than I expected to find you," he said.

"So are you," she replied. This was no Daniel Lambert, but a tall, well-made man. That mutual survey over, they moved on as far as the two columns.

"Let me tell you all I know," he said. "Here executions were held in the days of the Republic. That is the Doge's palace, and behind there should be the giant's staircase, on the top of which the Doges were crowned, and Marino Faliero had his head struck off. Seeing Venice is like living through the details of a dream. One almost wishes one did not know so well how it looks. Yet dream and reality can never be quite the same. No; the circumstances under which I am seeing this are more dreamlike than even a dream could be."

"When you resume your journey you will wonder if it ever happened at all."

"No," he said, quickly and decidedly. "There are some things which can never be forgotten, and this will be one of them."

They entered the Piazza of St. Mark. He drew out his watch and stood still.

"I have wanted to see this," he said, "ever since I was a child. There they go," and the bronze vulcans over the arched entrance to the Merceria walked round the bell and struck the hour.

"I wonder you have not been here before."

"So do I. But I am glad, very glad, that this is my first visit."

The moon lighted up the cathedral, its gilded and frescoed façade and many cupolas, like daylight. They mingled with the crowd assembled there, listening to the music, and then they had an

ice at Florian's. There they sat some time, he talking well on varied subjects, she listening and interested. The thinning of the crowd first made them become aware that the band was gone and that it was late. He started up.

"How selfish you must think me to have kept you so long away from your sister's reception!"

"She has one every week, you know; so it does not much matter."

"You mean that that gives you the better opportunity of seeing your friends often?" he returned quickly, and sitting down again.

"Certainly," she answered quietly, with the faintest possible smile. "But you are going to India, and I shall not see you again."

He looked at her, and as their eyes met, his face lighted up as it had done once before.

"My train starts in an hour," he said, gloomily, after a pause of some length.

She rose, and in a few minutes they were in a gondola on their way back. They were both very silent until they came in sight of the Trenchs' palace; then Richard Barton began quite abruptly:

"Before I left London, I saw your grandfather's lawyers."

She started, partly at the sudden dispelling of that dream-like feeling, partly at his curt, business-like tone and manner.

"Yes?" she forced herself to say.

"They told me what I, for one, had quite forgotten—that we must decide within a given time who is to have the fortune."

"Oh, yes, exactly," she answered, feeling unreasonably chilled by his manner, yet answering with as practical a voice as his. "How long have they given us?"

"Until my return from India."

"And when will that be?"

"As soon as I know, I will write and tell you."

She bent her head in assent, not caring to speak lest he might detect disappointment in her voice.

"If I thought—that I might come instead, and receive my instructions from yourself—I——"

"Perhaps I shall not be here," she said merrily, taking courage to look at him. "I fly about, too, sometimes."

"Then may I take wings and fly after you?"

He did not press her for an answer in words, but as he leapt from the gondola, and helped her out, he held her hand for a moment in his.

"Is that a bargain?" he asked gently, as he sought her eyes.

"Yes; it is a bargain."

And half an hour later he was on his way to India.

There is no need to give any of the further correspondence between Richard Barton and Grace Davenport. It extended over a

good many months, and neither of them ever said a word about the charity. Grace received each letter with more pleasure than the previous one, yet looked forward to the next with ever-increasing anxiety. She would not have confessed it to anyone, but since she had seen this dreaded "inherited husband," her imagination conjured up very different fears from those with which she had previously tortured herself. Hidden behind that business-like mind of his, might he not have an "ideal," and was she——

One evening, having arrived at this usual point in her reflections, Mr. Trench suddenly joined her on the balcony, where she was looking sadly up at the moon and starlit sky.

"Grace," he said, "no more star-gazing, my dear. You must come to earth for a while, if you can."

She looked at him in the utmost bewilderment, but he only laughed with evident pleasure, and returned into the room. The next moment Richard Barton, bronzed and flushed, stood in his place. Grace gave a little cry and half rose from her seat; but he drew a chair up to hers and took her hand and held it.

"I have come for your decision," he said.

"And I cannot make it. You must not ask me," she answered in the greatest distress.

He bent towards her, paling visibly.

"Why not?"

"The responsibility is too great."

"But you have decided one way or the other?"

She bent her head.

"Will you let me hear it?"

Six months before he would never have believed that his heart would beat so fast as he said those words.

"Only on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That if you do *not* agree with it, you will frankly tell me so."

He looked anxiously, yet fixedly, at the pretty face changing colour so rapidly under his steady gaze.

"I accept your condition."

Grace drew a deep breath, yet did not, by that means, much aid her powers of speech.

"I—I think," she stammered, blushing and looking, as Richard Barton thought, the sweetest girl his eyes had ever rested on: "I think that grandpapa's money ought *not* to go to the charity." And then she took courage to look up for his answer. And right frankly did Richard Barton give it. He bent and took from her lips his first kiss, but not his last.

WHITE COLUMBINES.

UNDER the sheltering elms they grew,
Heavy with honey and wet with dew.
The velvet bee,
With slumbrous hum,
To the banquet free
And fair would come.
The earliest he at the royal feast,
And the latest there as a favoured guest
Till the last red glow
Of the sunset shines
On the creamy, clustering
Columbines.

Hither for mazy sarabands,
In and out of the emerald wands,
Butterflies haunt
The nodding flowers
And idly flaunt
Thro' the waving bowers.
Out of the azure, in purple and gold,
They flutter and softly their pinions fold
Drinking the dews
And quaffing the wines
Of the creamy, clustering
Columbines.

I, like the bee, for the honeyed dew
Of the year's sweet prime which is ever new
With broken rhyme,
I haunt the bloom
Of summer time
From glow to gloom.
Out of the sorrow of winter's frost,
I come to thee with the murmurous host,
Shamrock of hope,
O trefoil mine!
O creamy, clustering
Columbine!

CLARA THWAITES.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. J. SWAIN

SHE TURNED TO THE STEWARD. "I AM SURE THAT THEY ARE ACTING FOR THE BES
OPEN THE DOOR."

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XIII.

SUSPICION.

THE church-clock of that small country place, Upper Marshdale, was chiming half-past nine on a dark night, as the local inspector turned out of the police-station, and made his way with a fleet step across a piece of waste land and some solitary fields beyond it. His name was Poole, and he was hastening to Marshdale House, as Lord Level's place was called. A mysterious occurrence had taken place there the night before: Lord Level, previously an invalid, had been stabbed in his bed.

The officer rang a loud peal at the outer gate, and a policeman, who had been already sent on, came from the house to answer the summons. He waited when they were both within the gate, knowing that he should be questioned. His superior walked half way up the avenue, and placed his back against a tree.

"What have you learnt, Jekyl? Any clue to the assassin?"

The policeman dropped his voice to a whisper, as though afraid the very trees might hear. "Speak up," sharply interrupted the inspector. "The air carries no tales."

"The case seems as clear, sir, as any we ever came across; a clear case against Lady Level."

It takes a great deal to astonish a police inspector, but this announcement certainly astonished Mr. Inspector Poole. "Against Lady Level?" he repeated.

"She's the guilty one, sir, I fear. But who'd think it, to see her? Only about twenty or so, and with beauty enough to knock you over, and blue eyes that look you down in their pride. She's dressed out like those high-born ladies do dress, in light silk that glistens as she walks, her neck and arms uncovered. There's a gentleman with her now, some friend of the family, and he won't let us go on with

our investigation. He came and stopped it, and said we were acting against Lord Level's wishes."

"But why do you suspect Lady Level?" inquired the inspector.

"Listen, sir. It appears certain that no one got in; the doors and windows were left safe, and were found so; hadn't been disturbed at all; there has been no robbery, or anything of that sort, and no suspicion attaches to any of the servants so far as I see. Then there are the facts themselves. The servants were aroused in the middle of the night by Lord Level's bell ringing violently, and my lady screaming. When they got to his room, there he lay, fainted dead off, stabbed in two places, and she pretty near fainting too, and dropped down in a chair in her silk dressing-gown ——"

"I am acquainted with the facts so far, Jekyl."

"Well, sir. Not a sign or a symptom was there of anybody else being about, or of anybody's having been about. Her ladyship's version is, that she was woke up by Lord Level calling to her, and she found him stabbed and bleeding. That is all she will confess to."

"And he?"

"He says nothing, I hear, except that he will not have the police called in. He did not even want to have a doctor. But his lordship is off his head with fever, and may not know what he is saying."

"How does Lady Level account for the knife being found in her room?"

"There it is," cried the man. "Whenever these people, let them be high or low, do an evil deed, they are certain to commit some act of folly which allows suspicion to creep in. They over-do it, or they under-do it. If anyone else had done it and carried the weapon to her ladyship's room, she must have seen who it was, and would surely have denounced him. And why did *she* put it there of all places? There's a fatality on them, I say, sir, and they can't escape it."

"But her motive for attacking him?"

"They were on bad terms, it seems. The servants heard them quarrelling violently earlier in the evening."

"Did the servants tell you this, to confirm their suspicions against her?"

"They don't suspect her, sir," replied Jekyl. "I and Cliff have drawn our own deductions by what they have said, and by personal observation."

The inspector mused. He was a kindly-disposed man, possessed his share of common sense, and did not feel so sure about the matter as his subordinate. "It appears scarcely credible that a young woman like Lady Level, hardly six months married, should attempt her husband's life, Jekyl. Where are these servants?"

"In the kitchen, sir. This way. There's no establishment to speak of. When my lord was detained here through damage to

his knee, my lady followed him down—against his will, it's whispered —and brought only her maid and a man-servant."

"I think you have been listening to a good deal of gossip," remarked Inspector Poole, as he moved on to the house.

Meanwhile Lady Level, in deep agitation, stood at the window which she had had thrown up for air, while she made the confession to Mr. Ravensworth, that she had been a witness to the attack on her husband. This she had denied before; and it might never have been wrung from her, but that she overheard the two policemen, already in the house, whispering their suspicions against her.

She was shocked, indignant, terrified. She leaned for support on the window frame, panting for breath in the cold night air.

"Arnold, am I to bear this?"

He stood with folded arms. He felt for her deeply: were she connected with him by near ties of blood, he could not have been more anxious to protect her; but a strong doubt that she *might* be guilty was working within him. He supposed she must have received some great provocation from Lord Level.

"How cruel they are to entertain such a suspicion! If they—if they——Oh, Arnold, they never will arrest me!—they never will publicly accuse me!" she uttered, as a new possibility occurred to her.

"Blanche, listen," he rejoined, talking to her as he had talked when she was a child. "All that can be done for you, I will do; but I cannot work in this uncertainty. Tell me the truth; be it good or be it ill, I will stand by you; but, if I am to be of service to you, I must know it. Was it you who struck Lord Level?"

"No. Have I not just told you so?"

"What you told me I do not understand. You say you saw it done ——"

"Then I did not see it done," she petulantly interrupted; and no more questions would she answer.

"Let me take you back to the fire," said Mr. Ravensworth, as he shut down the window. "You are trembling with cold."

"Not with cold," was her reply.

Stirring the fire into a blaze, he drew the easy chair near it for her. He then stood by, saying nothing.

"Suppose they should openly accuse me?" she began, after a silence. "Would they arrest me?"

"Blanche," he retorted, in sharp, ringing, imperative accents, "are you guilty? Tell me, one way or the other, that I may know what to be at."

Lady Level rose and confronted him, her blue eyes wearing their most haughty expression. "You have known me for many years, known me well; how then can you repeat that question? *I* guilty of attacking Lord Level!"

"I would rather believe myself—I could as soon believe my own

wife guilty of such a thing; but why have you equivocated with me? You have not told me the truth, as to what passed that night."

"My husband charged me not to tell anyone."

"Five minutes ago you told me yourself that you saw it done; now you say you did not see it. What am I to think?"

"In saying I saw it done, I spoke hastily, what I ought to have said was, that I saw who did it. And then, to-day, Lord Level insisted that I had been dreaming," she abstractedly continued. "Arnold, do you believe that we can see visions or dream dreams that afterwards wear the semblance of realities?"

"I wish you would not speak in riddles. The time is going on; those men of the law may come in and accuse you, and what defence am I to make for you? You know that you may trust me. What you say shall never pass my lips."

Lady Level deliberated. "I will trust you," she said at length: "there seems to be no help for it. I went to rest last night angry with Lord Level, for we had spoken irritating words to each other. I lay awake, I daresay for an hour, indulging bitter thoughts, and then I dropped asleep. Suddenly something woke me; I cannot tell you what it was: whether it was any noise, or whether it was the opening of the door, which I had closed, between my room and Lord Level's. All I know is, that door was wide open, and someone stood in the doorway with a lighted candle. It was a strange-looking object, and seemed to be dressed in flannel—either a long flannel shirt, or a flannel gown. In the confusion of the moment I believed it must be Lord Level, and I was struck with amazement, for Lord Level is not able to get out of bed without assistance, from the injury to his knee, and I thought how long his hair was and how dark it had grown—that was, you know, when I was between sleeping and waking. Then I saw that it had large flashing black eyes, so it could not be Lord Level. It crossed the room ——"

"Blanche," he interrupted, "you speak just as if you were describing a vision. It ——"

"That is what Lord Level now says it was. Let me go on. It crossed the room as far as the dressing-table. I started up in bed then, and the wild eyes turned upon me, and at the same moment Lord Level called out from his own bed, apparently in agitation or pain. The figure dropped something, turned round, and darted back again through the open door to the other chamber. I saw the candle fall from its hand to the floor, and the place was in darkness, except for the little light that came from Lord Level's night-lamp. Terror overwhelmed me, and I cried out, and then my husband called to me by name. I ran to his room, flinging on my warm silk dressing-gown as I went, and there I found him hurt in some way, for he was bleeding from the arm and from the side. Arnold, as I live, as I breathe, that is the whole truth," she concluded with emotion.

"Did you again see the figure? Was it in Lord Level's room?"

"It was not there. I saw no trace of it. I remember I picked up the candlestick, for it was right in my path, and I screamed when I saw the blood upon my husband. He caught me to him by the other arm, as I have told you, telling me not to be frightened, that he would protect me; and I saw how white he looked, and that his brow was damp. Presently I asked him who and what it was; and the question seemed to excite him. 'Say nothing of what you have seen,' he cried; 'I charge you, *nothing*.' I don't quite know what I replied; it was to the effect that the household must be aroused, and the figure searched for. 'Blanche, you are my wife,' he said, solemnly; 'my interests are yours; I charge you, by your duty and obedience to me, that you say nothing. Bury this in silence, as you value your life and mine.' Then he fainted and his hold relaxed, and I screamed out and the servants came; had my life depended upon it I could not have helped screaming. What the figure had dropped in my room proved to be the knife."

"This is a very strange account," exclaimed Mr. Ravensworth.

"It is so strange that I lose myself at times, wondering whether I was dreaming or awake. But it was true; it was true; though I could not proclaim it in defiance of my husband."

"Do you think the figure, as you call it, could have been one of the servants in disguise?"

"I am certain it was not. Not one of them has that dark Italian face."

"Italian face!" echoed Mr. Ravensworth. "Why do you call it an Italian face?"

Lady Level bent her head. "The thought somehow struck me," she answered, after a pause. "Not at the time, but since. I fancied it not unlike the Italian faces that one sees in pictures."

"Was it a man or a woman?"

"I do not know. At the time I took it to be a man, quite young. But since, recalling the appearance—well, it seems to me that it is impossible to decide which it was."

"And you saw no signs of this mysterious figure afterwards?"

"None whatever. There were no traces, I tell you, of its having been there, except the injury to Lord Level, the knife, and the fallen candlestick. The candlestick may have been left in Lord Level's room the previous night, for it is precisely like those used in the household, so that the figure may have lighted it from the night lamp."

Mr. Ravensworth could not make much of all this. It puzzled him. "The curious thing is," he said aloud, "where could the figure have come from?"

"The curious thing is, that Lord Level wants to persuade me now that this was only a dream of the imagination."

"That his wounds are?"

"Not his wounds, of course—or the knife, but a great deal of

what I told him. He ridicules the bare idea of its being a 'strange figure,' 'strangely dressed.' He says he caught a full view of the man who attacked him; that he should know him again; that he was dressed in a sort of soft light fustian, and was no more wild-looking than I am, except such wildness as arose from his state of inebriation, and he suspects he was a poacher who must have got in through one of the windows."

Mr. Ravensworth pondered over the tale: and he could not help deeming it a most improbable one. But that traces of some mysterious presence had been left behind, he would have regarded it as her husband appeared partially to regard it—a midnight freak of Lady Level's imagination. "Yet the wounds are realities," said Mr. Ravensworth, speaking aloud, in answer to his own thoughts.

"Arnold, it is all a reality," she said impressively. "There are moments, I say, when I am almost tempted to question it, but in my sober reason I know it to have been true, and while I ask myself, 'Was it a dream?' I hold a perfect, positive conviction that it was only too terrible a reality."

"You have spoken once or twice of its wild appearance. Did it look like a madman?"

"I never saw a madman, that I know of. This creature looked wild enough to be mad. There was one thing I thought curious in connection with finding the knife," proceeded Lady Level. "Timms, who picked it up, while Sanders had gone down for some hot water, brought it into Lord Level's room, calling out that she had found the weapon. 'Why, that's Mr. Drewitt's knife,' exclaimed the housemaid, Deborah, as soon as she saw it; and the steward, who had only just reached the room, asked her how she could make the assertion. 'It is yours, sir,' said Deborah; 'it's your new knife; I have seen it on your table, and should know it anywhere.' 'Deborah, if you repeat that again, I'll have you punished,' sharply called out the housekeeper, without, you understand, turning from Lord Level, to whom she was attending, to ascertain whether it was or was not the knife. Now, Arnold," added Lady Level, "ill and terrified as I felt at the moment, a conviction came across me that it was Mr. Drewitt's knife, but that he and Mrs. Edwards were purposely denying it."

"It is impossible to suspect them of attacking, or conniving at the attack on Lord Level."

"They attack Lord Level! They would rather attack the whole world combined, than that a hair of his head should suffer. They are fondly, devotedly attached to him. And Deborah, it appears, has been convinced out of her assertion. Hark! who is that?"

Mr. Ravensworth opened the door to reconnoitre. The inspector was prowling about the house and passages, exploring the outlets and inlets, followed by his two men, who had done the same before him.

"I thought you had forbidden the men to search," cried Lady Level. "Why are they disobeying you?"

"Their chief is here now, and of course his orders go before mine. Besides, after what you have told me, I consider there ought to be a thorough search," added Mr. Ravensworth.

"In opposition to Lord Level?"

"I think that Lord Level has not taken a sufficiently serious view of the case. The only solution I can come to is, that some escaped madman got into the house before it was closed for the night, and concealed himself in it. If so, he may be in it now."

"Now! In it now!" she exclaimed, turning pale.

"Upon my word, I think it may be so. The doors and windows were all found safely fastened, you see. Therefore he could not escape during the night. And since the doors were opened this morning, the household, I take it, has been so constantly on the alert that it might be an extremely difficult matter for him to get away unseen. If he, this madman, did enter yesterday evening, he must have found some place of concealment and hidden himself in it for hours, since it was not until one o'clock that he made the attack on Lord Level."

"Oh, Arnold, that is all too improbable," she rejoined, doubtingly. "A madman could not plan and do all that."

"Madmen are more cunning than sane ones, sometimes."

"But I—I think it was a woman," said Lady Level, lowering her voice and her eyes.

Mr. Ravensworth looked at her. And for the first time, a feeling flashed into his mind that Lady Level had some suspicion which she would not speak of.

"Blanche," he said, sharply, "do you know who it was? Tell me, if you do."

"I do not," she answered emphatically. "I may imagine this, and imagine that, but I do not know anything."

"You were speaking, then, from imagination?"

"Y—es. In a case of mystery, such as this, imagination runs riot, and you can't prevent its doing so."

Again there was something about Lady Level that struck Mr. Ravensworth as being not honestly true. Before more could be said, steps were heard approaching the room; and Lady Level, afraid to meet the police, made her escape from it.

Running swiftly upstairs, she was passing Lord Level's door to enter her own, when she heard his voice, speaking collectedly, and peeped in. He saw her, and held out his hand. He appeared now quite rational, though his fine grey eyes were glistening and his fair face was flushed. Mrs. Edwards was standing by the bedside, and it was to her he had been talking.

Blanche advanced timidly. "Are you feeling better?" she softly asked.

"Oh, much better; nearly well: but for my knee I should be up and about," he answered, as he drew her towards him. "Mrs. Edwards, will you close the door? I wish to speak with my wife."

Mrs. Edwards, with a warning glance at her lady, which seemed to say "He is not fit for it;" at least Blanche so interpreted it; went out and shut the door. Lord Level drew her closer to his side. He was lying propped up by a mound of pillows, almost sitting up in bed, and kept her standing there.

"Blanche," he began in very quiet tones: "I hear the police are in the house."

"Yes," she was obliged to answer, quite taken aback and feeling very much vexed that he had been told, as it was likely to excite him.

"Who sent for them? You?"

"Oh, no."

"Then it was your friend; that fellow, Ravensworth. I thought as much."

"But indeed it was not," she eagerly answered, shrinking from her husband's scornful tones. "When the two policemen came in—and we do not know who it was sent them—Mr. Ravensworth went to them by my desire to stop the search. I told him that you objected to it."

"Objected to it! I forbade it," haughtily rejoined Lord Level. "And if—if ——"

"Oh, pray, Archibald, do not excite yourself; do not, do not!" she interrupted, frightened and anxious. "You know you will become worse again if you do."

"Will you go and end it in my name? End it, and send them away from the house."

"Yes, if you tell me to do so; if you insist upon it," she answered. "But I am afraid."

"Why are you afraid?"

Lady Level bent her head until it was on a level with his. "For this, Archibald," she whispered: "That they might question me—and I should be obliged to answer them."

Lord Level gently drew her cool cheek nearer, that it might rest against his fevered one, and remained silent, apparently pondering the question.

"After I told you all that I saw and noticed that night, you bade me be silent," she resumed. "Well, I fear the police might draw it from me if they questioned me."

"But you must not allow them to draw it from you."

"Oh, but perhaps I could not help it," she sighed. "You know what the police are—how they question and cross-question people."

"Blanche, I reminded you last night that you were my wife, and you owed me implicit obedience in all great things."

"Yes, and I am trying to obey you; I am indeed, Archibald," she protested, almost torn by conflicting emotions; for, in spite of her

doubts and suspicions, and (as she put it to herself) her "wrongs," she loved her husband yet.

"Well, my dear, you must be brave for my sake; ay, and for your own. Listen, Blanche: you will tell the police *nothing;* and they *must not search the house.* I don't care to see them myself to forbid it; I don't want to see them. For one thing, I am hardly strong enough to support the excitement it would cause me. But ——"

"Will you tell me something, Archibald?" she whispered. "Is the —the—person—that attacked you in the house now?"

Lord Level looked surprised. "In this house? Why, how could it be? Certainly not."

"Was it—was it a woman?" she breathed, her voice low and tremulous.

He turned angry. "How can you be so silly, Blanche? A woman! Oh, yes," changing to sarcasm, "of course it was a woman. It was you, perhaps."

"That is what they are saying, Archibald."

"*What* are they saying?" he returned, in dangerous excitement—if Blanche had only noticed the signs. For all this was agitating him.

"Why that," she answered, bursting into tears. "The police are saying so. They are saying that it was I who stabbed you."

Lord Level cried out as a man in agony. And, with that, delirium came on again.

CHAPTER XIV.

NOT LIFTED.

My Lady Level sat at the open window of her husband's sitting room, in the dark, her hot face lifted to the cool night air. Only a moment ago Lord Level had been calling out in his delirium, and Mrs. Edwards was putting cool appliances to his head, and damp, hot bricks to his feet. And Blanche knew that it was she who, by her indiscreet remarks and questioning, had brought on the crisis. She had not meant to harm or excite him; but she had done it; and she was taking contrition to herself.

It was now between ten and eleven o'clock. She did not intend to go to bed that night; and she had already slipped off her evening dress, and put on a morning one of soft grey cashmere. With his lordship in a fresh attack of fever, and the police about, the household did not think of going to rest.

Blanche Level sat in a miserable reverie, her lovely face pressed upon her slender hand, the tears standing in her blue eyes. She was suspecting her husband of all kinds of unorthodox things—this has been said before. Not the least disloyal of them being that an individual named Nina, who wore long gold earrings to enhance her charms, was concealed in that east wing, which might almost be called a separate house, and which owned a separate entrance.

And a conviction lay upon Lady Level—caught up since, not at the time—that it was this Nina who had attacked Lord Level. She could not drive away the impression.

Naturally she was bitterly resentful. Not at the attack, but at all the rest of it. She had said nothing yet to her husband, and she did not know whether she ever should say it; for even to speak upon such a topic reflected on herself a shame that stung her. *Of course* he forbade the search lest this visitor should be discovered, reasoned she; that is, he told her to forbid it: but ought she to obey him? Lady Level, cowering there in the darkness, would have served as a perfect exemplification of a small portion of Collins's "Ode to the Passions."

> "Thy numbers, Jealousy, to naught were fixed,
> Sad proof of thy distressful state;
> Of differing themes the veering song was mixed,
> And now it courted love, now raving, called on hate."

Thus was it here. One moment she felt that she could—and should—put Lord Level away from her for his falsity, his treachery; the next she was conscious that life without him would be one long and bitter penance, for she had learned to love him with her whole heart and soul.

And until that miserable sojourn at Pisa, she had deemed that he returned her love, truly and passionately. Fie on the deceitful wiles of man!

A stir in the passage without. Was there any change in Lord Level, for better or for worse? Despite her resentment, she was anxious, and she opened the door. Mrs. Edwards had come out from the opposite chamber, a basin in hand.

"My lady, he is calmer," whispered the housekeeper, answering the unspoken question which she read in the eyes. "If he could only be kept so, if he had nothing to disturb him, he would soon be well again. It is a most unlucky thing that these police should have come here, where they are not wanted. That of itself must bring excitement to his lordship."

"It is unlucky that these tales should have been carried to him," haughtily reproved the young lady. "I cannot think who does it, or why."

"Nay, my lady, but when his lordship questions of this and that, he must be answered."

Closing the door of the sick chamber very quietly, Mrs. Edwards passed down the stairs. At the same moment, covert steps were heard ascending them. Lady Level caught a glimpse of Mr. Inspector Poole's head, and stole back out of sight.

Meanwhile Mr. Ravensworth had been trying to gain a little explanation from that official. "Do you know," he said to him, "that you are here against Lord Level's wishes, and in direct opposition to his orders?"

"No, I do not," replied the inspector. "I did not understand it in that light. I certainly was told that his lordship had said he would not have the case officially inquired into, but I understood that he was light-headed when he spoke, not at all conscious of what he was saying."

"From whom, then, did you receive your instructions, Mr. Poole?"

"From Dr. Macferraty," was the ready answer. "He called in at the station this evening."

"Ah!" cried Arnold Ravensworth.

"It would be a grave mistake, he said, if so monstrous a thing—they were the doctor's own words—should be left uninvestigated, because his lordship was off his head," added the inspector. "May I ask, sir, if you entertain any suspicion—in any quarter?"

"Not any," decisively replied Mr. Ravensworth. "The whole thing is to me most mysterious."

The speakers looked at one another. Mr. Poole was deliberating whether he should give a hint of what Jekyl had said about Lady Level. But he was saved the trouble.

"I understand, through overhearing a word or two, that your men have been wondering whether the culprit could have been Lady Level," spoke Mr. Ravensworth in low tones. "The very idea is monstrous: you have but now used the right word. *Believe me*, she is innocent as a child. But she is most terribly frightened."

"Well, I thought it very unlikely," admitted the inspector.

"But it seems," slowly continued Mr. Ravensworth, weighing well his words, "that she caught sight at the time, or thought she caught sight, of a figure curiously attired in white flannel; who dropped, or flung, the knife down in her chamber. Lord Level says it was not white flannel but light fustian, such as a countryman might wear. According to that, he must also have seen the individual. The difficulty, however, is, to know whether his lordship is speaking in his senses or out of them."

"Someone must have got in, then, after all. In spite of the doors being found as they were left."

"I think so. I cannot see any other loophole of suspicion to fall back upon. Concealed himself in the house probably beforehand. And, for all we know, may be concealed in it still. I gathered an impression while Lady Level was talking to me that it might really be some escaped madman. All the same, Lord Level persists in forbidding the matter to be investigated."

Keen and practical, the officer revolved what he heard. The story was a curious one altogether, and as yet he did not see his way in it.

"I think, sir," he said with deliberation, "that I shall take the affair into my hands; and act, in the uncertain state of his lordship's mind, upon my own responsibility. First of all, we will just go through the house."

Mr. Ravensworth went with him: they two together. After a thorough search, nothing wrong could they find or discover. The servants and the two policemen remained below; Mrs. Edwards was in close attendance upon his lordship; and the steward, who appeared most exceedingly to resent the presence of these police in the house, had shut himself into his rooms.

In the course of time, the inspector and Mr. Ravensworth approached these rooms. Passing Lord Level's chamber with soft footsteps, they traversed the passages beyond it, until they found themselves stopped by a door, which was fastened.

Mr. Poole shook it. "It must lead to some of the remote rooms," he observed, "and they are uninhabited. Just the spot for an assassin to conceal himself in—or to try to do so."

"I think these may be the steward's apartments," spoke Arnold Ravensworth doubtingly. "I remember Lady Level said they were only divided from his lordship's chamber by a passage or two."

Whose ever rooms they were, no one came to the door in answer to the summons, and the inspector knocked again.

This time it brought forth Mr. Drewitt. They heard him draw a chain, and then he opened the door a few inches, as far as the chain permitted him.

"Will you let us in, Mr. Drewitt? I must search these rooms."

"Search for what?" asked the old man. "It's you, is it, Poole! I cannot have my rooms searched. This morning, after the alarm, I went over them, to be quite sure, and that's sufficient."

"Allow me to search for myself," returned the officer.

"No, sir," answered the steward, with dignity. "No one shall come in to search these rooms in opposition to the wish of my lord. His orders to me were, that the affair should be allowed to drop, and I, for one, will not disobey him, or give help to those who would. His lordship believed that, whoever it might be that attacked him, came in and went out again. The country might be hunted over, he said, but not his house."

"I must enter here," was all the answer reiterated by the officer.

"It shall be over my body, then," returned the steward, trembling with emotion. "My lord forbade a search, and you have no right whatever to proceed to it."

"My good man, I am a police inspector."

"You may be inspector-general for all I care," retorted the old gentleman, "but you don't come in here. Get my lord's authority first, and then you will be welcome. As to reminding me who you are, Mr. Poole, you must know that to be superfluous. And I beg *your* pardon, sir," he added, addressing Mr. Ravensworth, "but I would inquire what authority you hold from my lord, that you, a stranger, should set at naught his expressed wishes?"

The door was shut and bolted in their faces, and the inspector leaned against the wall to think. "Did you notice his agitation?"

he whispered to Mr. Ravensworth. "There's more in this than meets the eye."

It certainly wore that appearance. However, for the present they were foiled, and the steward remained master of the position. To attempt to enter those rooms by force would create a noise and commotion in the house that might be disastrous to the health of Lord Level.

"There's *something* in those rooms that has to be concealed," spoke the astute inspector. "If it be the man who attacked Lord Level ——"

"But the steward, devoted as he is to his master, would not harbour *him*," impulsively interrupted Arnold Ravensworth.

"True. Unless—unless, mind you, there exists some cause, which we cannot even guess at, for his lordship's shielding him," said the inspector. "I must say I should like to get into the rooms."

"There is no other way of doing it; no other entrance."

"I don't know that, sir. Unless I am mistaken, these rooms communicate direct with the East Wing. By getting into that, we might find an unsuspected entrance."

He made his way downstairs in silence, musing as he went. At the foot of the staircase he encountered Deborah.

"Which are the passages in this lower part of the house that lead to the East Wing?" he inquired.

"Not any of them, sir," answered Deborah, promptly. "At least not any that are ever opened. At the end of the stone passage there's a heavy door, barred and bolted, that leads to other passages, I believe, and to other heavy bolted doors, and they lead into the East Wing. That's what I have heard say. The only entrance in use is the one through Mr. Drewitt's rooms."

Opposition seemed only to strengthen the will of Mr. Inspector Poole. "Into the rooms I mean to make my way," he said to Mr. Ravensworth, as he retraced his steps up the staircase. "Could you not," he hastily added, "get Lady Level to bring her authority to bear upon old Drewitt?"

It was the appearance of Lady Level that probably induced the thought. She, looking pale, haggard, and uneasy, was peeping down at them, and did not escape in time.

Arnold Ravensworth, somewhat hesitatingly, acceded. They wished to speak to Mr. Drewitt—he put it to her in that way—but he had bolted himself into his rooms; would she use her authority and bid him admit them?

She complied at once, unsuspiciously. Of all parts of the house, that occupied by the steward must be most free from concealment. And she went with them to the barred up door.

The steward did not presume to dispute Lady Level's mandate, which she gave somewhat imperiously. She entered with them.

They found themselves in the old gentleman's sitting-room, and he placed chairs for them. "We have not come to sit down," said Mr. Poole; and he passed into the other rooms in rapid succession: the two bed-chambers and the unoccupied room that had nothing in it but a few trunks. A very cursory inspection convinced him that no person was being harboured there.

"Why could you not have admitted us just now, Mr. Drewitt?" he asked.

"Because you brought not the authority of either my lord or my lady," answered the faithful old retainer.

The inspector strode to the end of the passage and stood before the oaken door already spoken of, examining its heavy fastenings. The others had followed him.

"This must be the door communicating between the house and the East Wing," he remarked. "Will you open it, Mr. Drewitt?"

"No, sir, I will not."

"But we must have it opened," interposed Arnold Ravensworth. "The fact is, we have some reason to fear the midnight assassin may be yet hiding himself on the premises. He does not appear to be in the house, so he may be in the East Wing—and we mean to search it."

"Are you an enemy of my lord's?" returned the old man, greatly agitated.

"Certainly not. I would rather be his friend. I have been the friend, if I may so express it, of Lady Level since she was a child, and I must see that she is protected, her husband being for the time laid aside."

"My lady," called out the old man, visibly trembling, "I appeal to you, as my lord's second self, to forbid these gentlemen from attempting to enter the East Wing."

"Be firm, Blanche," whispered Mr. Ravensworth, as she came forward: "we must search the East Wing, and it is for your sake."

She turned to the steward. "I am sure that they are acting for the best. Open the door."

For one moment the old man hesitated, and then he wrung his hands. "That I should be forced to disobey the wife of my lord! My lady, I crave your pardon, but I will not open these rooms unless I have the express authority of his lordship to do so."

"But I wish it done, Mr. Drewitt," she said, blushing hotly.

Police inspectors have generally the means of carrying out their own will. Mr. Poole, after critically regarding the fastenings, produced one or two small instruments from his pockets and a bunch of keys. As he was putting one of the keys into the lock for the purpose of trying whether it would fit, a curious revulsion came over Lady Level. Possibly the piteous, beseeching countenance of the steward induced it. "He *is* my husband, after all," she whispered to her own heart.

"Stop!" she said aloud, pushing the key downwards. "I may not have the right to sanction this in opposition to the wish of Lord Level. He has forbidden any search to be made, and I must do the same."

There was a moment's silence. The inspector gazed at her.

"When his lordship shall be sufficiently well to see you, sir, you can take instructions from him if he sees well to give them," she added to the officer civilly. "Until then, I must act for him, and I forbid ——"

"Highty-tighty, and what's the matter here?" broke in a hearty voice behind them, at which they all turned in surprise. Making his way along the passage was a portly, but rather short man of sixty years, with an intellectual brow and benevolent countenance, a red face and a bald head. The change in Mr. Drewitt's look was remarkable; its piteousness had changed to radiance.

The new-comer shook hands with him. Then he turned and affably shook hands with the inspector, speaking gaily. "You look as if you had the business of all the world on your shoulders, Poole."

"Have you seen my lord, Mr. Hill?" asked the steward.

"I got back home to-night and came on here at once, hearing of the hubbub you are in, and I have seen my lord for a few minutes. And this is my lady—and a very charming lady I am sure she is," he added, bowing to Lady Level with an irresistible smile. "Will she shake hands with the old man who has been doctor-in-ordinary to her lord's family for ages and ages?"

Blanche put her hand into his. She, as she was wont sometimes to tell him in days to come, fell in love with him at once.

"What a blessing that you are back again!" murmured the good old steward.

"Ay," assented Mr. Hill, perhaps purposely misinterpreting the remark, "we will have Lord Level up and about in no time now. —Mr. Poole, I want a private word with you."

The doctor drew him into the steward's sitting-room, and closed the door. The conference did not last more than a minute or two, but it was very effectual. For when Mr. Inspector Poole came forth, he announced his decision of withdrawing all search at present. To be resumed if necessary, he added, when his lordship should have recovered sufficiently to give his own orders.

The only one who did not appear to be altogether satisfied with this summary check was Arnold Ravensworth. He did not understand it. Upon some remark being made as to Lady Level's safety from any attack by the midnight villain, Mr. Hill at once told her *he* would guarantee that. And though he spoke with a laugh, as if making light of the matter, there was an assurance in his eye and tone that she knew she might implicitly trust to.

"Then—as it seems I cannot be of any further use to you to-night, and as I may just catch the midnight up train, I will wish you

good-bye, Lady Level," said Mr. Ravensworth. "I am easy about you, now Mr. Hill is here. But be sure you write for me if you think I can be of service to you or to Lord Level."

"I will, I will," she answered. "Thank you, Arnold, for coming."

Marshdale House returned to its usual monotony, and a day or two went on. Nothing more was seen, no, nor heard, of the unknown individual who had so disturbed its peace; the very mention of it was avoided. Nevertheless, Blanche, turning matters over in her mind, could only look at it, and at that detestable East Wing, with an increased sense of mystery. "But for knowing that someone was there who might not be disclosed to the honest light of day, why should he have forbidden the search?" ran the argument that she was for ever holding with herself; and she steeled her heart yet more against her husband.

On this, the second afternoon after the commotion, she was sitting reading a newspaper in the garden, where the sun was shining hotly, when Mr. Hill, who had been up with Lord Level, appeared.

"Well," said the doctor, cheerily, halting before her, "he is a great deal better, and the knee's ever so much stronger. I shall have him up to-morrow. And in a couple of days after that he may venture to travel to town, as he is so anxious to get there."

"Your treatment seems to agree with him better than Dr. Macferraty's did," she answered.

"Ay: I know his constitution, you see. Good day, Lady Level. I shall be in again to-night."

Soon after the doctor went out, there was heard a shrill whistle at the gate, together with a kicking about of gravel by a pair of rough boots. Lady Level looked up, and saw the boy from the station bringing in a parcel.

"Well, Sam," said she, as the lad approached. "What have you come for?"

"They sent me on with this here parcel—and precious heavy he is for his size," replied Sam Doughty, as without ceremony he tumbled the parcel on to the bench by Lady Level's side. It was addressed to her, and she knew that it contained some books which Mr. Ravensworth had promised to send down. "Come down by the mid-day train," curtly added the boy for her information.

"Do you get paid for delivering parcels, Sam?"

"*Me* get paid!" returned the youth, with intense aggravation; "no such luck. Unless," added he, a happy thought striking him, "anybody likes to give me something for myself—knowing how weighty they be, and what a lug it is for one's arms."

"This parcel is not at all heavy," said Lady Level.

"I'm sure he is, then, for his size. You should lift, though,

what I have to drag along sometimes. Why, yesterday that ever was, I brought a parcel as big as a house to the next door; one that come from Lunnon by the mid-day train just as this'n did; and Mother Snow she never gave me nothing but a jam tart, no biggur nor the round o' your hand. She were taking a tray on 'em out o' the oven."

"Jam tarts for *her* delectation!" was the thought that flashed through Lady Level's mind. "Who was the parcel for, Sam?" she asked aloud.

"'Twere directed to Mrs. Snow."

"Oh. Not to that lady who is staying there?"

"What lady be that?" questioned Sam.

"The one you told me about. The lady with the long gold earrings."

Sam's stolid countenance assumed a look of doubt, as if he did not altogether understand. His eyes grew wider.

"*That* 'un! Her bain't there now, her bain't. Her didn't stop. Her went right away again the next day after she come."

"*Did* she?" exclaimed Lady Level, taken by surprise. "Are you sure?"

"Be I sure as that's a newspaper in your hand?" retorted Sam. "In course I be sure. The fly were ordered down here for her the next morning, and she come on to the station in it, Mr. Snow a sitting outside."

"She went back to London, then!"

"She went just t'other way," contradicted the boy. "Right on by the down train. Dover her ticket were took for."

Lady Level fell into a passing reverie. All the conjectures she had been indulging in lately—whither had they flown? At that moment Mrs. Edwards, having seen the boy from the house, came out to ask what he wanted. Sam put on his best behaviour instantly. The respect he failed to show to the young lady was in full force before Mrs. Edwards.

"I come to bring this here parcel, please, ma'am, for Lady Level," said he, touching his old cap.

"Oh, very well," said Mrs. Edwards. "I'll carry it indoors, my lady," she added, taking it up. "You need not wait, Sam."

Lady Level slipped a sixpence into his ready hand, and he went off contented. Mrs. Edwards carried away the parcel.

Presently Lady Level followed, her mind busy as she went upstairs. She was taking some contrition to herself. What if—if it was all, or a great deal of it, only her imagination?—that her husband was not the disloyal man she had deemed him?

His chamber door was closed; she passed it and went into her own. Then she opened the door separating the rooms and peeped in. He was lying upon the bed, partly dressed, and wrapped in a warm dressing-gown; his face was turned to the pillow, and he was apparently asleep.

She stole up and stood looking at him. Not a trace of fever lingered in his face now; his fine features looked wan and delicate. Her love for him was making itself heard just then. Cautiously she stooped to imprint a soft, silent kiss upon his cheek; and then another.

She would have lifted her face then, and found she could not do so. His arm was round her in a trice, holding it there, his beautiful grey eyes had opened and were fixed on hers.

"So you care for me a little bit yet, Blanche," he fondly whispered. "Better this than calling me hard names."

She burst into tears. "I should care for you always, Archibald, if—if—I were sure you cared for me."

"You may be very sure of *that*," he emphatically answered. "Let there be peace between us, at any rate, my dear wife. The clouds will pass away in time."

On the Monday morning following, Lord and Lady Level departed for London. The peace, patched up between them, being honestly genuine and hopeful on his lordship's part, but doubtful on that of my lady.

Still nothing had been said or done to lift the mystery which hung about Marshdale.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE NIGHT IN ESSEX STREET.

We go on now to the following year: and I, Charles Strange, take up the narrative again.

It has been said that the two rooms on the ground floor of our house in Essex Street were chiefly given over to the clerks. I had a desk in the front office; the same desk that I had occupied as a boy; and I frequently sat at it now. Mr. Lennard's desk stood opposite to mine. On the first floor the large front room was furnished as a sitting-room. It was called Mr. Brightman's room, and there he received his clients. The back room was called my room: but Mr. Brightman had a desk in it and I had another. His desk stood in the middle of the room before the hearth-rug; mine was under the window.

One fine Saturday afternoon in February, when it was getting near five o'clock, I was writing busily at my desk in this latter room, when Mr. Brightman came in.

"Rather dark for you, is it not, Charles?" he remarked, as he stirred the fire and sat down in his arm-chair beside it.

"Yes, sir; but I have almost finished."

"What are you going to do with yourself to-morrow?" he presently asked, when I was putting up my parchments.

"Nothing in particular, sir." I could not help sometimes retaining my old way of addressing him, as from clerk to master. "Last Sunday I was with my Uncle Stillingfar."

"Then you may as well come down to Clapham and dine with me. Mrs. Brightman is away for a day or two, and I shall be alone. Come in time for service."

I promised, and drew a chair to the fire, ready to talk with Mr. Brightman. He liked a little chat with me at times when the day's work was over. It turned now on Lord Level, from whom I had heard that morning. We were not his usual solicitors, but were doing a little matter of business for him. He and Blanche had been abroad since the previous November (when they had come up together from Marshdale) and had now been in Paris for about a month.

"Do they still get on pretty well?" asked Mr. Brightman: for he knew that there had been differences between them.

"Pretty well," I answered, rather hesitatingly.

And, in truth, it was only pretty well, so far as I was able to form a judgment. During this sojourn of theirs in Paris I had spent a few days there with a client, and saw Blanche two or three times. That she was living in a state of haughty resentment against her husband, was indisputable. Why, or wherefore, I knew not. She dropped a mysterious word to me now and then, of which I could make nothing.

While Mr. Brightman was saying this, a clerk came in, handed a letter to him, and retired.

"What a nuisance!" cried he, as he read it by fire-light. I looked up at the exclamation.

"Sir Edmund Clavering's coming to town this evening, and wants me to be here to see him!" he explained. "I can't go home to dinner now."

"Which train is he coming by?" I asked.

"One that is due at Euston Square at six o'clock," replied Mr. Brightman, referring to the letter. "I wanted to be home early this evening."

"You are not obliged to wait, sir," I said. I wished to my heart later—oh, how I wished it!—that he had not waited!

"I suppose I must, Charles. He is a good client, and takes offence easily. Recollect that breeze we had with him three or four months ago."

The clocks struck five as he spoke, and we heard the clerks leaving as usual. I have already stated that no difference was made in the working hours on Saturdays in those days. Afterwards, Mr. Lennard came up to ask whether there was anything more to be done.

"Not now," replied Mr. Brightman. "But I tell you what, Lennard," he added, as a thought seemed to occur to him: "you may as well look in again to-night, about half-past seven or eight,

if it won't inconvenience you. Sir Edmund Clavering is coming up; I conclude it is for something special; and I may have instructions to give for Monday morning."

"Very well," replied Lennard. "I will come."

He went out as he spoke; a spare, gentlemanly man, with a fair complexion, and thin, careworn face. Edgar Lennard was a man of few words, but attentive and always at his post, and a most efficient superintendent of the office and of the clerks in general.

He left, and Mr. Brightman rose, saying he would go and get some dinner at the Rainbow. I suggested that he should share my modest steak, adding that Leah could as easily send up enough for two as for one: but he preferred to go out. I rang the bell as I heard him close the front door. Watts answered it, and lighted the gas.

"Tell your wife to prepare my dinner at once," I said to him; "or as soon as possible: Mr. Brightman is coming back to-night. You are going out, are you not?"

"Yes, sir, about that business. Mr. Lennard said I had better go as soon as I had had my tea."

"All right. It will take you two or three hours to get there and back again. See to the fire in the next room; it is to be kept up. And, Watts, tell Leah not to trouble about vegetables to-day: I can't wait for them."

In about twenty minutes Leah and the steak appeared. I could not help looking at her as she placed the tray on the table and settled the dishes. Thin, haggard, untidy, Leah presented a strange contrast to the trim, well-dressed upper servant I had known at White Littleham Rectory. It was Watts who generally waited upon me. When Leah knew beforehand that she would have to wait, she put herself straight. To-day she had not known. My proper sitting-room upstairs was not much used in winter. This one was warm and comfortable, with the large fire kept in it all day, so I generally remained in it. I was not troubled with clients after office hours.

"I wonder you go such a figure, Leah!" I could not help saying so.

"It is cleaning-day, Mr. Charles. And I did not know I should have to come up here. Watts has just gone out."

"It is a strange thing to me that you cannot get a woman in to help with the cleaning. I have said so before."

"Ah, sir, nobody knows where the shoe pinches but he who wears it."

With this unintelligible remark, as à propos to the question, and a deep sigh, Leah withdrew. I had finished dinner, and the tray was taken away before Mr. Brightman returned.

"Now I hope Sir Edmund will be punctual," he cried, as we sat together talking, over a glass of sherry. "It is half-past six: time he was here."

"And there he is," I exclaimed, as a ring and a knock that shook the house resounded in our ears. After five o'clock the front door was always closed.

Watts being out, we heard Leah go to the door in her charming costume. But clients pay little attention to the attire of laundresses in chambers.

"Good Heavens! can Sir Edmund have taken too much!" uttered Mr. Brightman, halting as he was about to enter the other room to receive him. Loud sounds in a man's voice arose from the passage; singing, laughing, joking with Leah. "Open the door, Charles."

I had already opened it, and saw, not Sir Edmund Clavering, but a young country client, George Coney, the son of a substantial and respectable yeoman in Gloucestershire. He appeared to be in exalted spirits, and had a little exceeded, but was very far from being intoxicated.

"What, is Mr. Brightman here? I only expected to see you," cried he, shaking hands with both. "Look here!" holding out a small canvas bag, and rattling it. "What does that sound like?"

"It sounds like gold," said Mr. Brightman.

"Right, Mr. Brightman; thirty golden sovereigns: and I am as delighted with them as if they were thirty hundred," said he, opening the bag to display its contents. "Last week I got swindled out of a horse down at home. Thirty pounds I sold him for, and he and the purchaser disappeared and forgot to pay. My father went on at me, like our old mill clacking; not so much for the loss of the thirty pounds, as at my being done: and all the farmers round about clacked at me, like as many more mills. Pleasant, that, for a fellow, was it not?"

"Very," said Mr. Brightman, while I laughed.

"I did not care to stand it," went on George Coney. "I obtained a bit of a clue, and the day before yesterday I came up to London—and I have met with luck. This afternoon I dropped across the very chap, where I had waited for him since the morning. He was going into a public-house, and another with him, and I pinned them in the room, with a policeman outside, and he pretty soon shelled out the thirty pounds, rather than be taken. That's luck, I hope." He opened the bag as he spoke, and displayed the gold.

"Remarkable luck, to get the money," observed Mr. Brightman.

"I expect they had been in luck themselves," continued young Coney, "for they had more gold with them, and several notes. They were for paying me in notes, but 'No, thank ye,' said I, 'I know good gold when I see it, and I'll take it in that.'"

"I am glad you have been so fortunate," said Mr. Brightman. "When do you return home?"

"I did mean to go to-night, and I called to leave with you this small deed, that my father said I might as well bring up with me,

as I was coming"—producing a thin folded parchment from his capacious pocket-book. "But I began thinking, as I came along, that I might as well have a bit of a spree now I am here, and go down by Monday night's train," added the young man, tying up the bag again, and slipping it into his coat-pocket. "I shall go to a theatre or two to-night."

"Not with that bag of gold about you?" said Mr. Brightman.

"Why not?"

"Why not! Because you would have no trace of it left to-morrow morning."

George Coney laughed good-humouredly. "I can take care of myself, sir."

"Perhaps so: but you can't take care of the gold. Come, hand it over to me. Your father will thank me for being determined, and you also, Mr. George, when you have cooled down from the seductions of London."

"I may want to spend some of it," returned George Coney. "Let's see how much I have got," cried he, turning the loose money out of his pockets. "Four pounds, seven shillings, and a few halfpence," he concluded, counting it up.

"A great deal too much to squander or lose in one night," remarked Mr. Brightman. "Here," added he, unlocking a deep drawer in his desk, "put your bag in here, and come for it on Monday."

George Coney drew the bag from his pocket, but not without a few remonstrative shakes of the head, and put it in the drawer. Mr. Brightman locked it, and restored the bunch of keys to his pocket.

"You are worse than my father is," cried George Coney, half in jest, half vexed at having yielded. "I wouldn't be as close and stingy for anything."

"In telling this story twenty years hence, Mr. George, you will say, What a simpleton I should have made of myself, if that cautious old Lawyer Brightman had not been close and stingy."

George Coney winked at me and laughed. "Perhaps he's right, after all."

"I know I am," said Mr. Brightman. "Will you take a glass of sherry?"

"Well; no, I think I had better not. I have had almost enough, already, and I want to carry clear eyes with me to the play. What time does it begin?"

"About seven, I think, but I am not a theatre-goer myself. Strange can tell you."

"Then I shall be off," said he, shaking hands with us, as only a hearty country yeoman knows how to.

He had scarcely gone when Sir Edmund Clavering's knock was heard. Mr. Brightman went with him into the front room, and I sat reading the *Times*. Leah, by the way, had made herself presentable, and looked tidy enough in a clean white cap and apron.

Sir Edmund did not stay long: he left about seven. I heard Mr. Brightman go back after showing him out, and rake the fire out of the grate—he was always timidly cautious about fire—and then he returned to my room.

"No wonder Sir Edmund wanted to see me," cried he. "There's the deuce of a piece of work down at his place. His cousin wants to dispute the will and to turn him out. They have been serving notices on the tenants not to pay the rent."

"What a curious woman she must be!"

Mr. Brightman smiled slightly, but made no answer.

"He did not stay long, sir."

"No, he is going out to dinner."

As Mr. Brightman spoke, he turned up the gas, drew his chair to the desk and sat down, his back then being towards the fire. "I must look over these letters and copies of notices which Sir Edmund brought with him, and has left with me," he remarked. "I don't care to go home directly."

The next minute he was absorbed in the papers. I put down the *Times*, and rose. "You do not want me, I suppose, Mr. Brightman," I said. "I promised Arthur Lake to go to his chambers for an hour."

"I don't want you, Charles. Mind you are not late in coming down to me to-morrow morning."

So I wished him good-night and departed. Arthur Lake, a full-fledged barrister now of the Middle Temple, rented a couple of rooms in one of the courts. His papers were in one room, his bed in the other. He was a steady fellow, as he always had been, working hard and likely to get on. We passed many of our evenings together over a quiet chat and a cigar, I going round to him, or he coming in to me. He had grown up a little, dandified sort of man, good-humouredly insolent as ever when the fit took him: but sterling at heart.

Lake was sitting at the fire waiting for me, and began to grumble at my being late. I mentioned what had hindered me.

"And I have forgotten my cigar-case!" I exclaimed as I sat down. "I had filled it, all ready, and left it on the table."

"Never mind," said Lake. "I laid in a parcel to-day."

But I did mind, for Lake's "parcels" were never good. He would buy his cigars so dreadfully strong. Nothing pleased him but those full-flavoured Lopez, whilst I liked mild Cabanas: so, generally speaking, I kept to my own. However, I took one, and we sat, talking and smoking. I smoked it out, abominable though it was, and took another; but I couldn't stand a second.

"Lake, I cannot smoke your cigars," I said, flinging it into the fire. "You know I never can. I must run and fetch my own. There goes eight o'clock."

"What's the matter with them?" asked Lake: his usual question.

"Everything; they are bad all over. I shall be back in a trice."

I went the quickest way, through the passages, which brought me into Essex Street, and had my latch-key ready to open the door with as I approached the house. There were three of these latch-keys. I had one; Lennard another, for it sometimes happened that he had to come in before or after business hours; and Leah had possession of the third. But I had no use for mine now, for the door was open. A policeman, standing by the area railings, recognised me, and wished me good evening.

Whose carelessness is this? thought I, advancing to the top of the kitchen stairs, and calling to Leah.

It appeared useless to call: no Leah made her appearance. I shut the front door and went upstairs, wondering whether Mr. Brightman had gone.

Gone! I started back as I entered; for there lay Mr. Brightman on the floor by his desk, as if he had pushed back his chair and fallen from it.

"What is the matter?" I exclaimed, throwing my hat anywhere, and hastening to raise him. But his head and shoulders were a dead weight in my arms, and there was an awful look upon his face, as the gaslight fell upon it. A look, in short, of death, and not of an easy death.

My pulses beat quicker, man though I was, and my heart beat with them. Was I alone in that large house with the dead? I let him fall again and rang the bell violently. I rushed to the door and shouted over the banisters for Leah; and just as I was leaping down for the policeman I had seen outside, or any other help that might be at hand, I heard a latch-key inserted into the lock, and Lennard came in with Dr. Dickenson. I knew him well, for he had attended Miss Methold in the days gone by.

As he hastened to Mr. Brightman, Lennard turned to me, speaking in a whisper:

"Mr. Strange, how did it happen? Was he ill?"

"I know nothing about it, Lennard. I came in a minute ago, and found him lying here. What do you know? Had you been here before?"

"I came, as Mr. Brightman had directed," he replied. "It was a little before eight; and when I got upstairs he was lying there as you see. I tried to rouse him, but could not, and I went off for the doctor."

"Did you leave the front door open?"

"I believe I did, in my flurry and haste. I thought of it as I ran up the street, but would not lose time in going back to shut it."

"He is gone, Mr. Strange," said Dr. Dickenson, advancing towards me, for I and Lennard had stood near the door. "It is a case of sudden death."

I sat down, bewildered. I could not believe it. How awfully sudden! "Is it apoplexy?" I asked, lifting my head.

"No, I should say not."

"Then what is it?"

"I cannot tell; it may be the heart."

"Are you sure he is dead? Dead beyond all hope?"

"He is indeed."

A disagreeable doubt rushed over my mind, and I spoke on the impulse of the moment. "Has he come by his death fairly?"

The surgeon paused before he answered. "I see no reason, as yet, to infer otherwise. There are no signs of violence about him."

I cannot describe my feelings as we stood looking down at him. Never had I felt so before. What was I to do next?—how act? A hazy idea was making itself heard that some weighty responsibility lay with me.

Just then a cab dashed up to the door; we heard it all too plainly in the hushed silence; and someone knocked and rang. Lennard went down to open it, and I told him to send in the policeman and fetch another doctor. Looking over the banisters I saw George Coney come in.

"Such a downfall to my plans, Mr. Strange," he began, seeing me as he ascended the stairs. "I went round to my inn to brush myself up before going to the play, and there I found a letter from my father, which they had forgotten to give me this morning. Our bailiff's been taken ill, cannot leave his bed, and father writes that I had better let the horse and the thirty pounds go for a bad job, and come home, for he can't have me away longer. So my spree's done for, this time, and I am on my way to the station, to catch the nine o'clock train."

"Don't go in until you have heard what is there," I whispered, as he was entering the room. "Mr. Brightman, whom you left well, is lying on the floor, and ——"

"And what?" asked young Coney, looking at me.

"I fear he is dead."

After a dismayed pause he went gently into the room, taking off his hat reverently and treading on tiptoe. "Poor fellow! poor gentleman!" he uttered, after looking at him. "What an awful thing! How was he taken?"

"We do not know how. He was alone."

"What, alone when he was taken! no one to help him!" returned the young man. "That was hard! What has he died of?"

"Probably the heart," interposed Dr. Dickenson.

"Last summer a carter of ours fell down as he was standing near us; my father was giving him directions about a load of hay, and when we picked him up he was dead," spoke the young man. "That was the heart, they said. But he looked calm and quiet, not as Mr. Brightman looks. He left seven children, poor chap."

At that juncture Mr. Lennard returned with the policeman. Another doctor, he said, would be round directly. After some general conversation, George Coney looked at his watch.

"Mr. Strange, my time's up. Would it be convenient to give me that bag of gold again? I should like to take it down with me, you see, just to have the laugh against the old folks at home."

"I will give it you," I said.

But for the very life of me, I could not put my hand into the dead man's pocket. I beckoned to Lennard. "Can you take out his keys?"

"Let me do it," said Dr. Dickenson, for Lennard did not seem to relish the task either. "I am more accustomed to death than you are. Which pocket are they in?"

"The right-hand pocket of his trousers; he always kept them there," was my answer.

Dr. Dickenson found the keys and handed them to me. I unlocked the drawer, being obliged to bend over the dead to do so, and young Coney stepped forward to receive the bag.

But the bag was not there.

(*To be continued.*)

A SPRING MORNING.

THE lark has risen, and the morn is flooding
The frail cloud-islands of the east with bright
And ever spreading waves of golden light;
The sturdy whitethorn in the vale is budding,
And new and tender leaves are thickly studding
The wrinkled trees; while over all the earth
The starry daisies, beautiful and white,
Joyously rising from their dreary night
Under the ground, look up with shining eyes;
The stream is rippling with a tranquil mirth,
And only new-born life and beauty lies
Peacefully dreaming under peaceful skies
Of summer, sailing up from southern seas,
With stores of treasure in her argosies.

A. ST. J. A.

THE POWER OF ATTRACTION.

A Fact.

By Anne Beale.

WHERE does the power of attraction lie? Is its seat in the outward man, the heart or the head? Who shall say? It certainly does not, of necessity, accompany genius, since many a donkey has it. Forgive the term, for it is involuntary and no metaphor. We all know that many a human donkey manages to attract individuals of talent if not of sense; but our donkey was a bonâ-fide four-legged specimen of the genus. Unlike the witless coxcombs, who sometimes attract by fine manners or smart clothes, his attraction was indefinable.

He lived, indeed still lives, in a pleasant paddock attached to a country house. He was well fed and well treated, and his amiable nature developed under these kindly influences. But it developed in a strange way. On the outskirts of his paddock was situated the pigstye, in which two comely and cleanly pigs were comfortably housed and reared; alas, for bacon! They were very happy together, so long as tyrant man did not come between them; but no sooner had they arrived at years of discretion than one of them was doomed. His master was obliged to pay the penalty of his free and happy country life, by the sacrifice of the animal bred on his land. And, truly, this is a penalty.

To use a Scripture phrase, but not irreverently, "One was taken and the other left." The one that remained vented his grief as pigs alone can. He put his forefeet, or more properly, his trotters, upon the door of his stye, stood erect, looked over it into the green and pleasant paddock, and grunted piteously. He was alone, and who but a misanthrope likes to be solitary?

Man does not estimate the mental sufferings of the brute, while he pities the physical. He would shudder at the cries of the wretched pig led forth to execution, but would not understand the emotion of the friend left behind.

But the donkey understood it. He first brayed in sympathy, then trotted up to the desolate swine. It was curious to see the two heads meet. Whether they kissed as they poked their noses at one another, or what they said in their peculiar language, cannot be known, but certain it is that the pig was consoled.

Moreover, the donkey reflected how he could further benefit his friend. He carefully examined the stye door, and finally unfastened the latch. The pig ran out, and it is recorded that he and his liberator passed a happy day together; for when they were dis-

covered, tête-à-tête, their master had not the heart to imprison the pig again till it was time for him to go to bed. He continued devoted to the donkey until it was his turn to share the common lot.

Happily we do not consider donkey's flesh good for food, so our attractive friend was left awhile alone. Not for long, however.

A little mare was brought into the paddock, and no sooner did she arrive than, metaphorically, she threw her arms round the donkey's neck. She took to him, in short. Henceforth she was always by his side, when, their work over, they were left to the enjoyment of leisure and friendly intercourse. They had a happy time of it. They fed together in summer, and shared the same shed in winter, so long as kindly Fate permitted them to be together.

But Fate, as is her wont, changed her tactics, and separated them. The little mare was sold, and taken to a distance. Doubtless she and the donkey understood this, but they were slaves of man, and could not remonstrate; so they were parted.

Some time afterwards the mare was brought to a farm at no great distance from the paddock. The donkey brayed; whether by chance, instinct or the subtle power of mesmeric attraction, can never be known; but the sound reached the ears of the mare. She broke loose, crossed a field belonging to the farm, forced the hedge, galloped down the portion of intervening road, leapt a ditch and fence, and was once more in the paddock by the side of her beloved Dobbin.

Sentimentalists talk of "The Language of Flowers." What of the language of the animal creation?

Again the friends were parted, and again the donkey was awhile alone.

His next companion was of his own race; a juvenile donkey purchased for the children of the family. The attachment of the new comer was more natural, but not less remarkable than that of his predecessors. He could scarcely be separated from his attractive comrade, and was, certainly, as "obstinate as a donkey" when about to be taken from him even for an hour.

But what shall be said of the final parting? The young donkey was sold in his turn, and when about to be led from the paddock, he planted his hoofs so firmly in the ground, that it was impossible to move him. At last, by dint of blows and tugs, they got him into the road, but when there he lay down, and no amount of kicks could induce him to get up again. A cart was finally procured, and he was lifted into it by main force, and conveyed to his destination.

Meanwhile the attractive philosopher brayed and pricked his ears, but did not die of grief at this third wrench of what should have been his vital force.

On the contrary, he at this moment rejoices in an admirer of quite

a novel character. Since children rule the world, the young donkey procured for their benefit has been replaced by a goat, also for their delectation. This horned, boisterous, and usually butting brute became mild as a lamb under the influence of asinine attraction. He and the donkey baa and bray together intelligently if not musically. The donkey receives the advances of the goat almost parentally, and no sharp horn ever ruffles the silky smoothness of his hide, though the gambols into which the one is led by the other are more astounding than any of our friend's previous adventures. He and his allies have always run races together, and thrown off their superabundant energy by acrobatic kicks and flings; but they usually performed their feats side by side, or at different parts of the paddock.

Now, however, the amusements are varied. No sooner does the donkey set off for a hard race round and round the paddock, than the goat leaps upon his back, and holds on nobody knows how, till the race is over. They accommodate one another in a masterly way as the goat descends, rest awhile, enjoying the dolce far niente of well-earned leisure, then set off again for their enjoyable gallop.

How long this new friendship shall endure must depend on their master, but at present they are quite happy in one another's society. The placid and accommodating donkey is supposed not to possess what are called "strong feelings," but is able, like many human beings, to face the inevitable, and manage his affections according to circumstances.

His boisterous admirer, on the contrary, would appear capable of a passionate attachment, if love is to be measured by demonstration. The goat's bounds and bleats after even a temporary separation, might be oppressive to a less receptive temperament; but our four-footed hero, like some bipeds of our acquaintance, is quite willing to receive more than he gives, and is quite happy in his power of attraction.

A MAN'S MISTAKE.

By Jessie Leete.

"OH, dear! I am so tired!"

"So tired, my darling? Well, never mind! It's all over now, and you will *never* have to go through it again, you know!"

The speakers were the sole occupants of a first-class carriage, in which they were rapidly whirling along towards London from the North. One was a decidedly pretty girl of some nineteen or twenty years. Not even the fatigue of which she complained could deprive her face of its piquant vivacity, and the very protest of weariness was uttered with a vigour, telling of considerable force still in reserve in the slender frame.

Her companion was a man on the borders of middle age. There was a certain out-of-door expression on his bronzed and bearded countenance, and a general suggestion of field sports in his largely-built figure, which stamped him at once as a country gentleman. Perhaps kindness and honesty were more legibly written on his countenance than any great amount of intellectual power. One could not picture him pondering very deeply, for instance, over the "Mystery of Life," or becoming the shining light of a Browning Society. Yet his was a face which few women could have been trusted to criticise impartially. At all times it was a good and pleasant countenance; and now, that it was radiant with the light of love, the brown eyes fairly brimming over with tenderness as they followed every movement of the daintily-arrayed figure by his side, no woman, at any rate, would have hesitated to pronounce Mr. Collingwood a handsome man.

A mischievous smile broke over his companion's face at his emphatic assertion of the final nature of the ceremony that day accomplished.

"Indeed, Jack? So you have quite made up your mind, that in the event of your quitting this mortal scene before me, I am to play the part of a Hindoo widow for the rest of my days? What a pity you did not insert a clause in those tremendously long, dry settlements, arranging a suttee in all due form!"

The shadow of a shade passed over her husband's face at her light rejoinder. She saw it at once, and placed her hand on his, in haste to heal the little wound.

"You didn't think I meant it, Jack, dear? You *know* that if you were to be taken from me——"

The eager protest got no further; it was cut short in a sudden, but not alarming manner.

The two had been married that morning in the village church where whole generations of Mr. Collingwood's forefathers lay sleeping. In one respect it had been a singular wedding; the bride had neither parent nor relation to give her into her husband's care, nor even the poorest apology for a home from which to make her début in her new life. She was just a solitary waif cast upon the world's wide shore, and gathered up by Jack Collingwood into his big, simple heart, there to be guarded thenceforth with the tender reverence many a princess of the blood longs for in vain.

Kathleen Raymond had been the bosom friend of Mr. Collingwood's young step-sister in a Hanoverian "pensionnat de demoiselles." The motherless daughter of an impecunious Irish officer, her father's sudden death had left the young girl singularly alone in the world, and when she quitted the "pensionnat" where she had known Mabel Collingwood,no other prospect lay before her but to join the great crowd of lonely women who are fighting for their own living.

But before beginning the much-dreaded search for employment, she had been persuaded by her more fortunate friend to take a long holiday among the hills and dales of Westshire. The orphan girl received a warm welcome to the hospitable old Dower House, where Mabel lived with her widowed mother, and there the bright weeks of that summer slipped gently by in happy idleness.

And then a most wonderful, and yet exceedingly natural and simple thing happened. Mabel's half-brother, the Squire of Annersley, *the* eligible bachelor of the country-side, the cynosure of every match-maker in the neighbourhood, fell swiftly, irretrievably, head-over-ears in love with the little penniless waif whom the Fates had cast up at his threshold.

There was no one living who had the right to say him nay in the matter, when once Kathleen's shy consent had been won, and the preparations for the marriage were hastened on as rapidly as possible.

To Mr. Collingwood himself it was a never-ending source of wonder that this consent should have been so easily and quickly gained. In his honest eyes Kathleen stood so far exalted above all ordinary human girls, so far removed from the crowd of young ladies whose attentions had often overwhelmed him with terror, it almost seemed to him that he was taking an undue advantage of her inexperience in linking her bright girlhood to his own more mature existence.

It is needless to say this was not the view of the situation taken by the world in general, and in particular by the Squire's elder sister, who for years had been at the head of his bachelor household. When Jack, blushing and stammering like a lad of twenty, carried the news of his success to Miss Collingwood, he was received with an air of lofty consideration, and to the long story of hopes, doubts and delights, she replied only with a cool—

"Of course, Jack."

"Why 'of course'?" asked her brother, sharply.

"Miss Raymond is a clever girl, Jack, and when the ball was actually laid at her feet, it was not likely she would fail to secure her advantage."

"She is not a whit more clever than good," answered the Squire. "She would not have accepted an emperor unless—unless she loved him as she loves me."

The Squire said it bravely, but he blushed again like a boy.

"There are few girls in Miss Raymond's position, Jack, who would fail to love the possessor of £5,000 a-year."

Mr. Collingwood left the room in speechless indignation.

The wedding was to take place from the Dower House, faute de mieux. Even the trousseau indispensable for the Squire's bride must be provided with the Squire's money. Jack managed the matter through his step-mother with careful delicacy, and Kathleen was so silent about the matter, he hoped that, amid the many excitements of her new position, she scarcely realised that the costly toilettes and dainty appurtenances which accumulated so fast during the short engagement were each and all her lover's gift.

"She is like a child for simplicity and unworldliness," said the Squire, in reply to some caustic remark of his sister's, "and she takes what is provided for her just as unquestionably as a child does."

"Miss Raymond quite understands—no one better—how much better it is to leave some things unsaid, Jack. It would be so exceedingly awkward to thank you for your lavish generosity, no doubt! She has gauged the depth of your purse and your folly equally well!"

Mr. Collingwood turned resolutely from his writing and faced his sister.

"Bertha, if we are to remain friends, you must and shall drop these continued insinuations against the girl who will soon be my wife. You understand me?"

Gentle as he usually was, when the Squire did "speak his mind," few ventured to answer him back, and Miss Collingwood subsided into angry silence.

The wedding was celebrated with all the éclat which would have befitted the nuptials of an heiress, for thus the Squire willed it. So bonfires blazed, bells clashed, banners decked the village street, villagers feasted, tenants danced, evergreens adorned the church, children strewed the bride's path with flowers. And all in honour of the girl who, only three short months before, had stood shivering on the threshold of a hard and lonely life of toil!

It was towards the close of that eventful day, that Kathleen Collingwood leant her throbbing head back against the cushions of the carriage, and the involuntary complaint escaped her lips at last: "I am *so* tired!"

Paris in August was unendurably hot and dusty, so the travellers hurried through its gay streets without a halt, scarcely pausing in their journey till Lucerne was reached. Here they rested through long sunny days, and Jack tasted the full enjoyment of his new happiness. It was the very delight of his heart to surround his Katie with every conceivable pleasure, and he found her a delightful person to pet and make much of, for she was bright, easily pleased, and grateful for every most trifling attention.

They sailed the lake by sunlight and by moonlight, climbed the Rigi by half-a-dozen different routes, defied the storms of Mont Pilate, visited every shrine of William Tell, and explored every corner of the quaint old town, before they bade farewell to the Lake of the Four Cantons and took their way over the Brünig down to Interlaken.

When Kathleen stepped on to the balcony of her room in the big Interlaken hotel where Jack had taken her, she turned pale with excess of delight. Before them the Jungfrau and her attendant giants rose majestically into their own calm region of silent beauty, their silhouettes sharply defined against the background of azure sky, closing in the lovely Lauterbrunnen Valley with a mighty rampart of peak and glacier. Kathleen watched the sun set that night, and saw the famous "colourisation" steal slowly over the dazzling snowfields, changing their silver radiance to a tender, pearly flush, like nothing else in nature.

"Can't we get nearer to them, Jack?" she asked in a whisper of hushed delight. "I would sleep in a hut and live on a crust if need be, just to be for awhile in the very heart of those mountains."

So Jack took her up the valley, and for a few days they were very happy in a little inn at the foot of the Staubbach. But before long, Kathleen said the giant cliffs on either side of the valley seemed pressing on her like prison walls, and begged to be taken "up higher."

Her word was law to her husband, so after two or three hours of a steep and rugged mountain path, they took up their abode at Mürren, thousands of feet above their late dwelling-place, and level with the untracked snows of the great range across the valley. Behind and above the narrow green shelf which affords room for the tiny Alpine hamlet rose "horns" beyond all power of counting or remembering, and below them pine-forests clothed the mountain sides with a mantle of sombre verdure. Here they decided to make a halt of several weeks.

It was during this stay at Mürren that Mr. Collingwood was first puzzled by a certain indefinable change in Kathleen. Not towards himself: to him her manner was gentle and affectionate as ever; but she grew quieter as the days went on, fonder of solitude, and often absent-minded.

Jack asked whether she found the place too dull.

"Certainly not," she answered, without hesitation 'How could I be dull, Jack, with you?"

The glow on her cheek and the clear brightness of her eye vouched for bodily health not being in fault, so Jack told himself that the little change could only exist in his over-anxious imagination. One thing, however, was plainly no fancy: Kathleen was fast losing the timidity of girlhood, and assuming the self-reliant dignity of her matronhood. When her husband one day proposed, half-teasingly, to undertake a difficult ascent, which would necessitate his leaving her for at least two entire days, to his surprise she not only made no objection to being left alone in the big hotel, but so urged him to carry out the idea that he was at last obliged to give way and depart.

The "ascension" was a most successful one—so the guides pronounced it, at any rate—occupying five or six hours less than the usual time allowed for it. But to Jack, undeniably the pleasantest moment of the whole excursion was the one in which he once again caught sight of the wooden balconies of the long, low hotel at Mürren. Involuntarily he quickened his tired steps in his impatience to see Kathleen's flush of happy surprise at their unexpectedly speedy return.

She was not to be found, however, either in the garden or the salon, so he hastened up to her own room. Neither was she there, though there were traces of her recent presence in the writing materials spread out on the table. The windows stood open, and the summer breeze had scattered some of her papers about the floor. As Mr. Collingwood stooped to gather up the flying sheets, his eye was caught by a closely-written page of Kathleen's pretty writing. All things were common property now, and his eye rested on the page, at first just for the pleasure of seeing her hand again, then in awakened curiosity, then in utter bewilderment.

The letter was without formal commencement, and ran thus :—

"It would be wiser and better not to write this at all, but I cannot any longer bear the pain of knowing that the news of my marriage will find you wholly unprepared. Max, you will say I can never have loved you; and, if it will spare one useless pang of regret, it is well you should think so. Yet I did speak the truth when I told you no other could ever be to me what you were. I know I spoke truth by the very difficulty of forgetting now that it is sin to remember. But I was friendless and penniless, and long years must have gone by before we could even have dreamed of marriage: you confessed it yourself. How was I to live through these years? Some women, no doubt, would have been strong enough to fight the world alone and wait; but it was not in me. I was weak and frightened; and when a good, generous man offered me his hand and home, I resolved to forget the past and the foolish promises I had given. Blame me as little as you can, Max; or, better still, forget me altogether. I am not altogether unhappy. My husband is very kind and good to me,

and by-and-bye I hope to love him as he deserves. Good-bye, Max! May you one day win the love of a better woman than I can ever be!"

The letter fell from Mr. Collingwood's unnerved hand, fluttering quietly away again beneath the table as he left the room, and slowly, in half-dazed fashion, made his way to a quiet nook in the garden where Kathleen and he had spent many a happy hour together.

The discovery was a terrible blow to him. Like many men who had married rather late in life, he had found a special charm in the idea that the very first emotions of his young wife's heart had been awakened by his own wooing. A hundred times he had exultingly said to himself, as his eyes rested on her fair girlish face—"She is *all* my own! No man before me could ever boast possession of one tiniest corner of her heart! Never has she even dreamed of any other love than mine!" And he had been so certain, too, that she stood on a pedestal of unworldliness which raised her far above the possibility of a mercenary thought or motive! It was very bitter to awaken from his sweet dream to find that, after all, he had been married for a home; and for a little while his wrath ran high against the woman who had deceived him. Thoughts of his sister's repeated warnings crowded upon his mind in unwelcome number. Why had not he heeded them more?

But never in his whole life had the Squire been able to keep his wrath at boiling-point through two consecutive hours, and before the last of the cigars in his case had gone the way of all tobacco, he was hard at work trying to frame excuses for Kathleen. So young, so lovely, so gentle—was it any wonder she had shrunk from the life of toil and dependence which lay before her through the years of waiting? This "Max," too, who was he, after all, that she should sacrifice herself for his sake? Some swaggering, beer-quaffing German student, who had sung sentimental "Ständchen" under her window by night, and filled her school-girl head with romantic rubbish—rubbish which, however, even now stood in the way of her returning the love of an honest man. How willingly would he have taught the fellow what a sound British horse-whipping meant!

When Kathleen at length returned from her walk, the Squire had thought out his future plan of action to his own entire satisfaction, and was prepared to meet his wife with calmness, if not with cheerfulness.

On a sunny afternoon some six weeks later in the year, Mr. Collingwood was lying on his back under a tree in the chestnut forest which clothes the lower slopes of the Dent de Morcles. Below, on the right, lay the little town of Bex, and in the distance beyond that, the gleaming waters of Lake Leman. To the left stretched the broad valley of the Rhone, rich in vineyards and

orchards, with the Glacier du Trient rising into the sky for a background. The turbid waters of the Rhone hurried along their channel almost at his feet, and on the other side of the valley rose the gleaming peaks and pinnacles of the Dent du Midi.

All this Mr. Collingwood might have seen from one of the forest clearings only a few hundred yards from where he lay. But he seemed to care for none of these things. He lay on the close soft turf peculiar to the chestnut woods, gazing up into the great tree overhead with a troubled cloud on his honest face.

"After all, what else could I have done?" he muttered half aloud at last, as though in hope that his perplexed thoughts might grow clearer by giving them utterance. "To a woman who had just written another man such a letter as that, any great demonstration of affection, even from a husband, could be nothing but an annoyance. I could *see* it bored her—why else did she grow so quiet and odd at Mürren? At first, no doubt, the very novelty of the thing carried her along all right, but as that wore off she began to feel the chain drag a bit. So I thought I'd keep more in the background for a time—give her her head a bit—and then she'd see I didn't want to bother her, and get to feel more settled in her mind."

The Squire fidgeted restlessly on his soft, warm couch, in vain efforts after an easier posture.

"But somehow it doesn't work as well as I expected. Work *well?* why can't I be honest with myself, and say plainly that it is a miserable failure? We are just drifting farther and farther apart every day we live! Ever since the hour I read that confounded letter—I wish I'd tumbled over a precipice first!—everything has gone wrong between us. She gets more reserved and depressed day by day, and I—well, do what I may, I'm for ever thinking of that wretched bit of paper, and wondering where her thoughts really are just then. If I could but forget the thing, and see in her my own true-hearted little Katie again!"

Mr. Collingwood made another fruitless attempt at comfort, then suddenly sprang to his feet with a strong exclamation.

"Why can't I be honest even with myself?" he said aloud, as he paced impatiently to and fro between the trees. "Why can't I say right out that I am eating my heart out with jealousy because I've seen her watching for the post so eagerly of late? If only I could be sure that scoundrel had dared to write to her, I'd shoot him, if I knew I should hang for it!"

As he uttered the words, Mr. Collingwood perceived at a little distance the tall, slender figure of his wife. She wore a dress of some soft grey stuff which fell around her with almost nun-like effect; her head was covered only by a little lace kerchief, for the forest ran close up to their little mountain "pension," and they were within a few hundred yards of its door. As the Squire, himself unseen, watched her slow, languid steps and pensive face, a

great longing to take her into his arms, and kiss the colour back to her pale cheek again, awoke in his heart, and he advanced quickly towards her. But as he did so he saw in her hand an open letter, and with a sudden misgiving he stopped abruptly. It was too late; his step had caught her ear, and he saw her hurriedly return the letter to her pocket as she came forward.

"I was looking for you, Jack," she said as they met. "There is something I want to ask you, but—but ——"

The pause was more eloquent than words. The Squire took his courage in both hands and resolved to face his fate bravely.

"Come and sit down here," he said quietly, pointing to a seat beneath one of the low, wide-spreading chestnuts, and placing himself beside her. There were a few minutes of uncomfortable silence, broken presently by Kathleen.

"I have wanted to tell you something for some days past, Jack—but it never seemed the right time."

"Have I made myself so very formidable to you?" asked Jack, with a sorry attempt at a smile.

"Not formidable, exactly—but—different, very different." Kathleen paused again, and then went on in broken, hurried tones.

"I know I am not half worthy of all the love you gave me once, Jack, dear—but, oh! don't take it quite from me, for it is all I have in the world!"

There were tears in her quivering voice, and the Squire felt an answering lump in his own throat as he replied:

"My poor little Katie!" That was all he could get out for a minute: then he cleared his throat, and went on:

"No fear of my love being taken from you, Katie, if only you will be open with me. But try to trust me—don't keep back your confidence from me!"

"Keep back my confidence? What do you mean, Jack? I have never kept anything from you—except one thing."

"Except one thing," echoed the Squire in his turn. "But to keep back one thing, Kathleen, is more than enough to work mischief between husband and wife."

Kathleen hung her head, blushing like a scolded schoolgirl.

"I didn't mean any harm, Jack! I always meant to tell you all about it some day, only you have been so distant and cold——"

She paused again.

Her husband took pity on her confusion.

"Suppose I were to tell you, Kathleen, that I know what you have to tell me already?"

"You know it already? But how?" stammered his wife.

"I found some writing in your room one day, and I read it before I saw that it was private."

The Squire's tone grew harder in spite of himself as he recalled the misery of that day. Kathleen looked up inquiringly, but her

eyes sank again as she saw the cold, set look of his face, and there was a minute's silence before she timidly spoke.

"Were you so angry, Jack?"

"Not angry, but bitterly hurt that you should have kept the thing a secret from me. Could you not have trusted me, Kathleen? Could you not have trusted me?"

"I—I never dreamt you would mind so much!"

"Not mind? What do you think I am made of, Katie?"

"I really didn't think there was any harm in it, Jack, dear."

The big brown eyes met his so trustfully and appealingly that Mr. Collingwood's heart melted within him. After all, what was she but a child? Her very words proved how lightly she regarded the whole matter. Yet even then there rang in his ears the words of that letter to her deserted lover to give the lie to the excuse he was framing for her.

"I want to tell you all about it, Jack," she said presently. "And I want to show you a letter, and ask you how I ought to answer it."

"Don't answer it at all," said her husband sharply.

"Oh, Jack! I must send *some* answer! What will he think of me, if I do not?"

"I don't care what he thinks. I distinctly forbid you to answer it."

The bright eyes filled with tears as she vainly looked for some token of relenting in the Squire's set and grave countenance.

"He is a gentleman, you must remember, dear—and it is such a nice letter!"

Her husband gazed at her, half bewildered by the coolness with which she placed the open letter in his hand.

"Am I to read this?" he asked coldly.

"Of course you are, Jack."

This was the letter the Squire read:—

"DEAR MADAM,—I have much pleasure in informing you that your story, 'A Bad Beginning,' has been accepted, and will appear in an early number of ——. I shall be glad at any time to read any story you may wish to submit to me. Would you be disposed to try your hand at a serial?

"I am, etc."

A sudden blaze of light broke on the Squire's perturbed mind.

"Tell me, Katie, isn't there some fellow called 'Max' in your story?" he demanded, so abruptly that Kathleen jumped with surprise.

"Max? Yes; Max is the hero—the tender-hearted, absorbed genius who falls in love with a frivolous, mercenary little wretch of a girl. She half breaks his heart and nearly wrecks his life; but I've paid her out for it all in the end!"

Mr. Collingwood took his wife in his arms, and covered her face with penitent kisses.

"How could I be such a fool?—how *could* I be such a fool?" he reiterated a dozen times as he held her close to his heart. But when he saw that Kathleen was looking really anxious, he forced himself into some degree of calmness, and spoke coherently again.

"Oh, my darling, I owe you such worlds of penitence and shame I can never, never humble myself enough before you! If you never forgave me at all for my miserable folly, it would only be exactly what I deserved. But you must forgive me, my Katie; indeed, I have been punished enough by the misery of the past six weeks. How *could* I be so foolish? But, oh, Katie, what did possess you to write that letter on your own notepaper, and leave it lying in your own room for me to find?"

"What letter can you mean, Jack?"

"The letter in which that girl tells your 'Max' of her marriage. That was the paper I found!"

"And you thought —— Oh, Jack!"

Kathleen's eyes met her husband's for one moment in reproachful astonishment, then they fell again, in shame for the man who had so little faith in his own chosen love. She was silent for some few minutes, and these minutes were as bitter as any the Squire had ever known. Presently she spoke again, very quietly.

"I wrote out that letter on note-paper just to see what length it really was, and how it read in that form. When did you find it?"

"The day I came back to Mürren from that long expedition."

"So long ago as that? Oh, Jack, if you had only asked me about it at once!"

"Didn't I tell you I was the biggest fool alive?"

But, woman-like, Kathleen would let no one blame him but herself.

"No—it was partly my fault too. I ought not to have had even so little a secret as that from you. But I knew you would laugh at me so dreadfully if you knew I had been trying to write. If the tale had not been accepted, I should never have said a word about it to anyone."

"Thank heaven, then, that it was accepted!" said Jack fervently, a pang darting through his heart as he remembered the gulf which had steadily been widening between them.

"I am very glad, you may be sure," said Kathleen, with her old merry smile. "You can't think how intensely I long to earn some money!"

"What on earth for? You know if your allowance is not sufficient, you have only to say so!"

"Yes, but that is not one bit what I want! You've no idea, I see, what a proud little monkey I am, and how it galled my pride to the quick to take all these things"—touching her pretty grey costume—"from you before even we were married!"

"My darling! I hoped you had never thought about it at all!"

"I thought about it constantly, Jack. I knew it was no good making a fuss. Your wife must have such things, and there was no possibility of my getting the money to pay for them. If the beggar-maid was so mean-spirited as to let King Cophetua put her on his throne, she must perforce submit to be tricked out at his expense. But I vowed I would save every possible shilling of my allowance, and pay you back for them as soon as I could. And then, when we were living so quietly at Mürren, the idea struck me that I might, perhaps, earn a few guineas by the turn I have always had for story-writing. And you see I have succeeded, Jack! *Now*, what may I answer to Mr. Editor's question about the serial story?"

"You may write a new 'Percy Vere, in forty volumes,' if you like, you witch! What *must* you have thought of my idiotic behaviour?" asked Jack, as he kissed the little hand lying in his big palm.

"I just thought you were finding out what a mistake you had made in marrying a poor little penniless nobody. Ah, Jack, I have been very, very miserable! But it is all over now, and will soon be all forgotten."

"No," began Jack, "I can never forget what a blind, stupid ——"

But his wife laid her soft lips to his, and sealed her forgiveness with a long kiss.

"You shall not abuse yourself any more, Jack. After all, your mistake was a very natural one."

"But why could I not have had the sense to question you at once?"

"Ah, why, indeed! That, Jack, was just 'A Man's Mistake.'"

LETTERS FROM MAJORCA.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Under Northern Skies," etc., etc.

Don Negro.

Palma, June, 1887.

My Dear E.—A good deal has happened since I posted my last letter to you. Very little more can happen now, for the vessel that is to convey us from these sunny shores lies in the harbour, and soon she will be getting up steam. But this is anticipating.

One night the doctor and I had been for our usual stroll under the night stars. It had been an intensely hot day. Everyone had prophesied a storm, and of course everyone had been wrong. There has been no rain for months, and the climate is growing unbearable. Nurse Long is beginning to feel its effects rather seriously. She is visibly diminishing, though she has nothing to spare in this respect. With Nurse Little, it is yet early days, but, unless we were mistaken, she will not hold out as well as Nurse Long. As I have already told you, their names, heights, contradictions, have all become hopelessly mixed, and, nine times out of ten, when we call to the one, the other puts in an appearance. They are as much mixed themselves as anyone, and are as puzzled at each other quite as much as they puzzle and perplex others.

The day had been intensely hot and brooding, but the storm had not come. The parched earth had remained unsatisfied. All nature was burnt up. We had been out in the afternoon for a short drive to Ben-Dinat. This is an estate that lies outside the town, beyond Il Tereno, and belongs to the Counts of Montenegro. It is one of the loveliest drives in the world. The road skirts and winds about the blue waters of the Mediterranean, and bay after bay opens up and point beyond point. The land falls back in slopes and undula-

tions, and chains of hills that rise to some height; many of them clothed in verdure.

Sleeping amongst the hills, in the utmost beauty of situation, a perfect paradise, lies Ben-Dinat. The house is square and castellated, a turret rising at each corner. It is very ancient, yet has been so renovated within and without that it looks brand new, and has lost its charm. Yet, even now, one might live there and feel in paradise.

On approaching it, you drive up through a wooded avenue; firs on one side, stretching far up the mountain heights: on the other, ilex, beeches, and other trees that spread their branches. Above the trees, as you ascend, the turrets are seen, rising with wonderfully picturesque effect. No other part of the house is visible. Velvet lawns open out, terraces of flowers, immense rhododendrons and gorgeous geraniums; all the choicest plants of this sunny South. Everything breathes of repose and retirement: and here, under certain conditions of life, how happy might that life be! I am not the only Englishman who has thought so, for here, some years ago, came the Marquis of Bute; saw the place, hired it, and occupied it for many months.

The old custodian received us and bowed us in with as much ceremony as if we had been the Counts of Montenegro themselves. It is a delightful place, spoilt by modernisation. The view from the roof was, of course, magnificent: a glorious stretch of coast and country, hill, valley and wood, bounded by the soft blue waters of the Levant. Afar off reposed Palma—that matchless panorama you must now know by heart—and we could just discern the windows of the Consulate, and the garden beneath them, from which the dusty palm trees reared their heads.

"What anxious days they have been!" I said, as we both happened to cast our eyes in that direction. "And how anxiety seems to linger with us. When will this enemy be subdued?"

"I hope I see daylight," replied the doctor. "I think we have conquered. I believe that all real danger is now over, and that these variations of temperature and slight accesses of fever are due to the climate. It is the Malta type."

"If so, A. will never really recover until he leaves the island."

"I am sure of it," answered Dr. Fitzgilbert, emphatically. "The sooner they send out a yacht from England, the better. It is the only way of getting him back safely. He would never travel through Spain and France, in this heat and in his present state, without running very great risk. When you return, if arrangements have not already been made, I hope you will help to facilitate them."

"I don't like the idea of leaving you all behind," I remarked. "Having been here from the beginning, I should like to see it all out to the end. To run away now seems rather like desertion."

"But I hope the battle's won," laughed the doctor; "and you have gone through the thick of the fight. You are not deserting, but

merely the first detachment going home in advance. Fancy what an object of interest you will be!"

The old custodian of Ben-Dinat was looking on in a respectful and patient attitude. Had he understood us, he might have been a little less at rest, perhaps, mentally, for we still belonged to the proscribed circle, and were not yet out of public quarantine. As it was, he performed his duties without suspecting the true state of affairs, and dismissed us with a Mallorcan benediction.

At the foot of Il Tereno, under the very shadow of Mr. Bateman's house, which stood nobly upon the hill side, and in its turn reposed under the shadow of ancient and dignified Belver, who should we come upon in all his glory, but Don Negro himself. Whether he had sniffed us afar off, or had obtained private information of our passing at that hour, I know not; but that he was there for no other purpose than to greet us was evident. At the turn of the road leading up to his happy quarters he was waiting with that one object: head turning right and left, mouth open, tail whisking, whilst every now and then he would jump up on his four paws, as if growing impatient, scattering a small cloud of dust in the air, which inconvenienced no one more than himself.

To have passed him without stopping, alighting and greeting him, would have been simply le déluge. In fact, I doubt if he would have permitted it. We should have found the road barricaded, and a warrant issued against us for high treason. Something, at any rate, would have happened. So out we jumped and advanced to his majesty. He received us, I assure you, with great dignity, and his beautiful brown eyes beamed with benevolence. This sounds alliterative.

But the dignified mood would not last. His delight at seeing us must find expression. You see, dog nature is not like human nature. Man thinks it proper to conceal his feelings: the deeper the feeling, in fact, the colder the outer man. But dog nature argues: Of what use having a running account at your banker's if you never draw cheques upon it? I think there is something to be said in favour of the dog's argument.

Don Negro drew a good many cheques just now. Most emphatically he passed from grave to gay. He frisked and gambolled, and barked and bayed, and threw up clouds of dust that were worse than any deluge. He thrust his front paws upon my shoulders, and but for the doctor's timely support I should certainly have gone down before the charge. Then he turned tail and ran up the road, looking back every now and then as an intimation that we were to follow him. You see, he is large-hearted. It is also incomprehensible to him that anyone could possibly pass the hospitable doors of Il Tereno without paying his respects to its owners. He is quite right. Only the stern fact of that necessity which has no law would make that possible. To-day our stumbling block was want of time. Instead of following

him we went back to the carriage, and when he saw this, down he rushed again like a shot from a gun, barking an indignant protest. But he found it was useless ; so finding out a favourite stone—he has any number of them stowed away in safe hiding-places—he took it up in his mouth, arched his neck, and with pride enough for Lucifer, tore down the road in front of us. He accompanied us as far as the bridge, and then, dropping his stone to bark us a long and determined farewell, he took up again his precious burden, and went tearing back homewards as if on a matter of life or death.

After a storm comes a calm. We pursued our quieter way through the town. At the Consulate Nurse Little met us. "I have just taken Mr. A.'s temperature," she said. "It is rising again."

"And for no apparent cause, I suppose?" said Doctor Fitzgilbert, who had begun to grow more resigned and less afraid of these capricious fluctuations.

"No cause whatever," replied Nurse Little. "He has been as calm and collected as possible. I have been reading Wordsworth to him, as the least exciting thing I could imagine."

"'We are Seven!'" laughed the doctor. "No, that would not bring on fever. And James—how is he?"

"Going on admirably. Yet he, too, keeps frightfully weak. He is quite raving for food; we shall be obliged to give him something ——"

"When you have my permission," interrupted Dr. Fitzgilbert, with all the weight of authority.

"Oh, of course. I never do anything on my own responsibility. But I think he might soon begin upon a mild pudding. The poor fellow just now said that he should like a roast sheep for lunch."

In came Barbara at this juncture. She and Nurse Little are very good friends ; but her motherly heart does not beat for her as it beats for Nurse Long. She threw up her hands and eyes as she disturbed the consultation. There was a determined look about her.

"If Jaime was to be allowed to starve very much longer, she should take upon herself to give him food in secret. He was absolutely dying of hunger, and for her part she would rather die of the fever."

But protest as she may, Barbara will never run counter to orders. She has too clear a sense of duty and is too well disciplined to transgress. Jaime will have to wait for his roast sheep.

So in the evening of this day, we had gone out for our stroll under the night stars. We had visited the breakwater and listened to the indolent plash of the tideless sea against the rocks and stones, of use only in her furious moods. We had passed the cabaret, whence the garish light streamed upon the dark night without. The usual sounds of music and revelry, dancing and twanging mandolins, of course were going forward. The amusements of these people have no variety. They would go on with the same words, songs, dances, night after

night and year after year, needing nothing more, asking for nothing better, until they sank into the grave.

We had strolled round the cathedral, and once more, and more

NURSE LONG. NURSE LITTLE.

than ever, admired its majestic outlines. Familiarity here breeds no contempt. Both within and without, the cathedral, in its way, is matchless. No wonder the Palma School influenced the architecture of the mother country.

On the silent ramparts we had listened to the fitful cry of that

shrieking harbinger, the screech owl. We had no Don Negro with us to bark his protest, but on the steps of the terrace at Il Tereno, we could imagine the growl that came from his disturbed slumbers. I assure you his majesty is quite an exceptional dog.

We had strolled through the town, passed the inevitable watchmen, heard the cry of others afar off, proclaiming the ever serene state of affairs, and from the telegraph office despatched a more hopeful message than usual to England. Then we had retraced our steps through the quiet streets, listened to the melancholy cry of the quail, watched the travelling stars, and so made our way back to the Consulate. The church clocks struck the hour as we passed through the courtyard. Midnight. We looked about for ghosts. None were visible. No doubt all were holding court in the cathedral: invisible to mortal eyes; playing melodies inaudible to mortal ears.

We went in and found our host, looking, I thought, slightly anxious.

"Doctor," he began, putting down the book he was reading: "what ought one's normal pulse to be?"

"From seventy to eighty-four," replied the doctor.

"Ah! I thought so; well mine's exactly eighty-four; the outside limit, you see."

"Rather high," returned Dr. Fitzgilbert. "Still it means nothing; especially in this hot climate. Eighty-four may be called normal."

"Doesn't mean fever, I suppose?"

The doctor laughed.

"What is your pulse?" asked M. turning to me.

"I don't know," I replied. "Never tried it."

"Try it now, then; just to please me."

"Anything for a quiet life," I returned, laughing; and went through the ordeal. It seemed as bad as having your photo taken, and a much longer process.

"Ninety-six," I gave out, when I had counted it two or three times over.

"Nonsense!" cried the doctor. "Pray don't joke upon such subjects."

"It is no joke, indeed," I said. "If you doubt me, take it yourself."

He crossed over and did so.

"You're quite right," cried he at last. "It *is* ninety-six." And he looked grave and rather pale—or I thought so.

"And that, I suppose, does mean fever?"

"Not at all. It means that you're excited and overdone and want rest. What with the dungeon, and the climate, and anxiety, and everything combined, I wonder you haven't knocked up long ago."

He sat back in his chair for a moment, apparently lost in thought, looking worried. Then, without making any remark, he suddenly got up and shut himself into the sick room.

"Dr. Fitzgilbert's rather in a way," I remarked to M., who had

ceased to be anxious on his own account, and was now anxious on mine. "He has gone in to report to Nurse Long; ask her what's to be done; tell her to make up the spare bed in A.'s room. We shall have quite a hospital ward here. Sister Cecilia will have to come back to us after all. In spite of what the doctor says, he evidently thinks I'm in for the fever."

"I think so too," replied M. "You've looked very funny the last day or two," he added, with a sort of Job's-comforter consolation, which sent a nervous thrill through me. "I thought eighty-four a good pulse, but ninety-six is outrageous."

In about five minutes the doctor returned, and sat himself opposite to me, just as he had done before.

"Now you must go to bed at once," he began in his most professional tones—and I felt that I was taken in hand and placed upon the sick list. "You see it's one o'clock in the morning, and in your present condition rest is absolutely necessary. I'll come with you as far as the dungeon."

"But first you may as well be candid with me," I returned: "and tell me at once that you think I'm in for the fever. If I *am* going to have it I ought to know it; and I see that you have made up your mind upon the subject."

"Quite the contrary; I don't think so," laughed the doctor hypocritically. "I think you are simply overdone. You have gone through a great deal, and have not had sufficient rest. We shall see how you are in the morning."

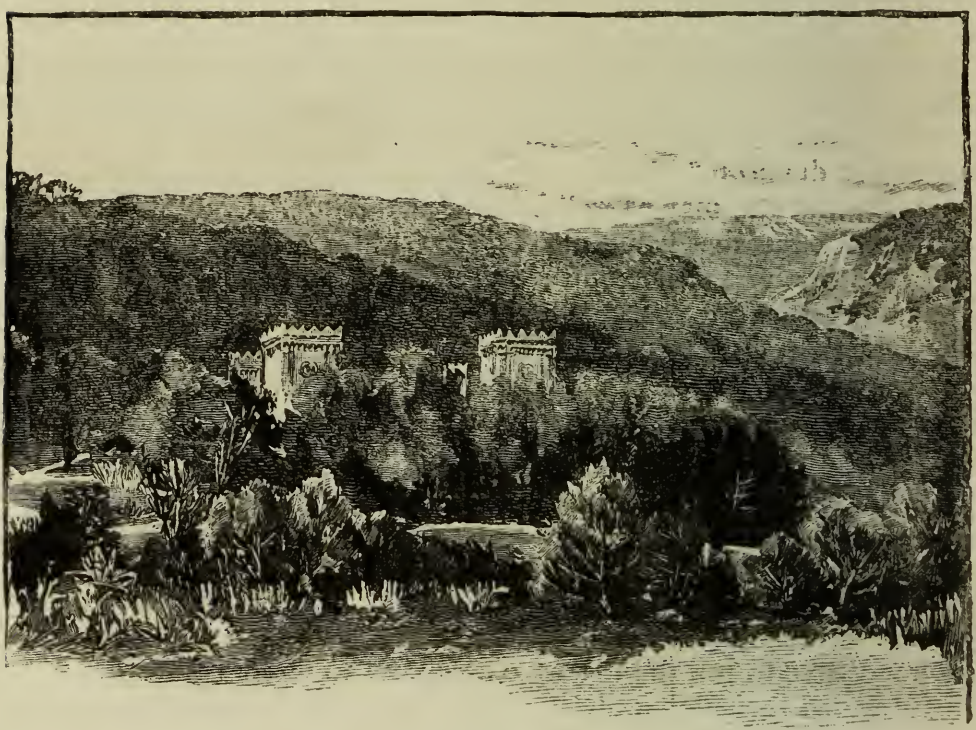
Away we went. But at the photographer's we parted company as usual. I sent him back again, and continued my solitary way. It is useless to say that I felt in a very exhilarated frame of mind. Fever out there to me meant almost certain death. I should never hold out against it. Then I thought of your anxiety at home. It would be impossible to run the risk of coming out to me.

I dreaded the coming night, and confess that I have never passed such a night and never wish to do so again. As usual I was utterly alone in that great barn of a palace. I scarcely know how I passed through the courtyard, scaled the staircase and entered the ghostly rooms. Silent and dark and echoing were they until I lighted my lamp, and then the shadows danced upon the walls, and took fantastic forms, and for once I seemed to have an army of ghosts about me. My nervous system was strung up almost to the point of delirium. The silence was oppressive, appalling. You will think this weak, but if you could realise all the circumstances of the case you would see that it is less so than it appears.

Sleep refused to come. All sorts of visions passed before me. A dread, shadowy form seemed hovering over me, with outspread sable wings. Would it fold them, or would it pass over the house? It was not the fear of death. It was the fear of dying there. It was the thought of work left undone; of wishes, desires, trusts committed

to my charge, all unfulfilled for want of time and opportunity. Like James, I thought of a tomb in a foreign land, and a broken pillar for a tombstone. I tried very hard to dwell upon the romantic side of the tragedy, and extract consolation from it; but I failed. It would not come.

I daresay I worked myself up into a fever of some sort. Can you wonder at it? If I had had anyone near me, it would have been different, and it would not have happened. As it was, a fevered imagination had its full play and ran riot. I have said that the solitude to-night was a burden, the silence appalling. Cleopatra the First and Cleopatra the Second stared at me from their elevation, and I



BEN-DINAT.

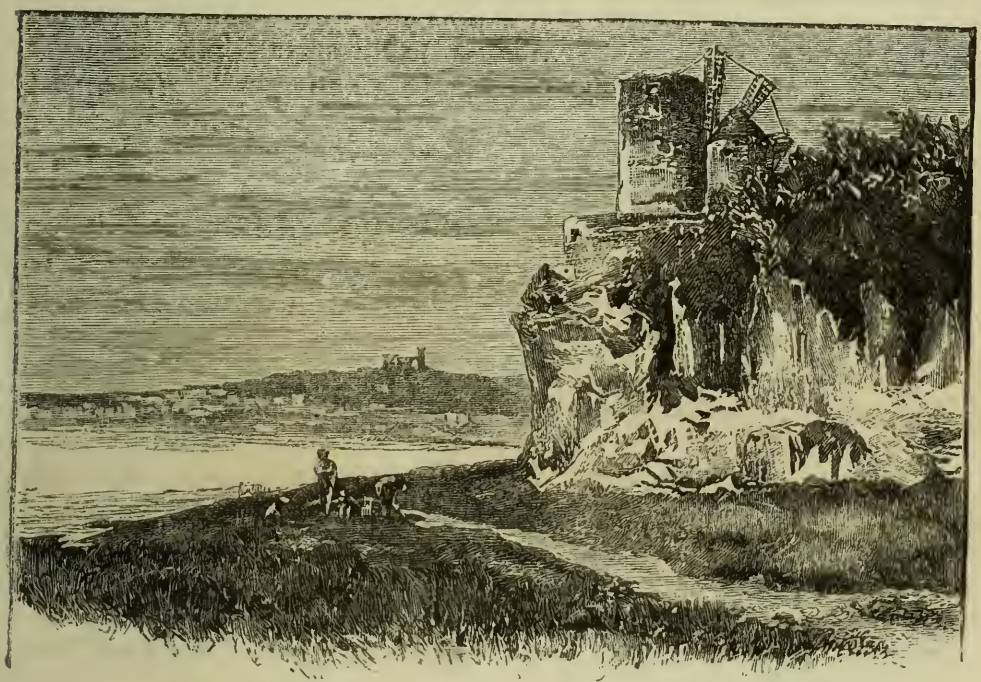
stared back at them with a sort of snake-fascination. Their black faces and glittering eyes became quite demoniacal. I thought they made mouths at me, and blinked, and shook their long earrings defiantly. And once I thought they gave a fiendish shriek, and seemed coming down from their pedestals to carry me off. I started up with a shiver of horror, and then found the shriek came from a peacock in the garden next door, which an old man, who lives on the ground floor, keeps for his own delectation and his neighbours' torment. A peacock and a turkey; and they are the best of friends, and often chant a duet which might be heard from one end of Palma to the other.

I fell back upon my pillow, as the peacock's shriek expired like the wail of a lost soul in its pain. The Cleopatras had not moved;

but I am certain they grinned and gibed. They were evil spirits pronouncing my doom. Every minute was an hour, and an hour was a year. I spent six hours alone. Only six hours. It seemed like six years' penal servitude. Six years? It was six centuries.

Watchman, what of the night? Could it, indeed, be serene? Could to-night be as last night, as other nights? Had not revolutions happened, earthquakes, a new order of things, a new state of existence? That night I went through the experiences of death. The article of death was read out to me, but, mercifully, was not signed.

So the night passed. Dawn had broken; the shadows fled away; daylight spread over the earth. I lay there exhausted, feverish,



ON THE WAY TO IL TERENO.

almost delirious. Then I heard the sound of a key turned in the lock, and Catalina's step passed through the rooms and the passages to her kitchen. Can you imagine what the sound was to me? I had had a vision of her coming in and finding me gone; cold as the black marble images before me. This, at least, had not happened, and she came as an angel of mercy.

I rose, wondering what the next act in my destiny was likely to be. I feverishly drained my teapot to its last drop; but the ensaimada, fresh, light, delicious, had to be left. It found other and grateful destination. Catalina's youthful but mischievous son accepted and devoured it without the smallest bashfulness or hesitation. No doubt he wished me a few more bad nights.

I felt refreshed, and began to think of the past night as of a hideous nightmare. Yet it was not altogether so. I felt that any-

thing might be about to happen, and I longed for the doctor's hearty reassurance. I would have given something to have seen him walk in as I was applying myself to the teapot with as much energy and affection as H. C. had bestowed upon his keg of anisette at Manacor.

But he did not come; and I felt slightly, very slightly, neglected. In his place I should have been round at eight o'clock. But it was evident that the mountain would not come to Mahomet, so Mahomet must go to the mountain. I thought I might call myself Mahomet this morning, considering that I had personated his coffin all night—hovering between heaven and earth.

I started for the Consulate: a feverish, nervous walk, though outwardly as calm as a summer sky, and as cool as a cucumber. If the storm was to come, none should know how it affected me.

On my way I called at the photographer's to ask him to prepare my bill, as I might be leaving that day; hoping, too, to see some photos he was developing for me, including those of Nurse Long and Nurse Little affectionately posing together.

"But what is the matter?" asked the man of cameras. "You look ill, quite unlike yourself. Surely you, also, are not going to have the fever? And yet you persist in living in that unhealthy old palace, and I shouldn't wonder."

"I am leaving it to-day," I replied. "Probably shall leave the island also. See that your bill is made out in time, or you may never get paid."

"Allons, donc, monsieur! You will not leave us to-day like that, all in a hurry! I would rather lose my bill."

I bowed, and remembered that I was talking to a Spaniard—albeit an honest and straightforward one. *Mais c'est plus fort qu'eux.* Compliments must pass.

"By the way, the doctor and the little lady have just been here for you, señor. Have you not seen them? They went on to your palace. I thought they seemed anxious about you."

The "little lady," of course, was Nurse Long. They are known in Palma as the "little lady" and the "great lady." The doctor and the nurse had never yet honoured me with an early visit together, and this sounded very much like a "consultation." They evidently thought me too ill to get up this morning, and had come to bear me up to the Consulate on a shutter.

I went back to the dungeon in search of Æsculapius. He had just left. I went on to the telegraph office, and there he had just left also. Back to the photographer's again. There they both were, sitting each like Patience on a monument smiling at Grief. But Grief in this instance was represented by their own photographs which I had taken with great success, and Mr. Solares had well developed. They pretended to be perfectly unconcerned at my appearance and greeted me with effusion.

"I thought I would come out for an earlier walk than usual," said Nurse Long. "I wanted a little fresh air before the heat of the day came on. Had a very trying night."

"So have I," I remarked drily.

"How are you, by the way?" asked the doctor. "How's the pulse?"

"Don't know," I replied. "We must go back to the Consulate and have a serious consultation, you and I. One thing is certain, if I am in for the fever, a boat starts to-day, and I go with it."

The doctor laughed ironically, sarcastically; anything but assentingly.

"You don't suppose that I would allow a man with typhoid fever to travel through Spain and France in this weather?" he said. "Why, he would die on the road."

"I should die if I remained here, and so I may as well die on the road," I replied. "One would be so much nearer to England. But come; we will to our consultation."

So back we went through the lovely Palma streets, that had little loveliness in them for me this morning. I was more in tune with the melancholy note of the poor quail. But first we called at the confectioner's to supply Nurse Long with her usual packet of favourite burnt almonds. These almonds, and her hour's walk with us every morning are the recreations of her life out here; these, and her daily letter to her brother in Cornwall; the gentleman whose name begins with *Tre*, which cannot by any means or device be turned and twisted into *Long*. I haven't quite reached the bottom of that mystery yet.

Arrived at the Consulate, the doctor at once took me into his own room. I felt like a prisoner about to receive sentence of execution.

"First the pulse," said he, treating the matter very cavalierly, as if momentous issues were not involved therein. "I daresay that galloping ninety-six has subsided to a mild eighty-four this morning."

I pretended the utmost indifference, and went through the ceremony without flinching. Not so the doctor. He sank back on his bed very limp, unstrung, and went as pale as a ghost. The two Cleopatras would have turned from black to white, only to have seen him.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Have I really gone down to eighty-four, and cheated you out of another patient?"

"Don't joke," he cried faintly; "you've gone up to a hundred and forty. I never felt such a pulse." He took it again three times over. Yes, it was one hundred and forty, sure enough. I took it myself and made it the same. "Where *can* you be galloping to?" he murmured.

"To England," I replied promptly, "for of course this does mean fever. And that means instant departure from Palma."

"I really think you are right. I believe you would just have time to reach England and be comfortably nursed in a less trying

climate than this," returned the doctor. "Sorry as I shall be to lose you"—I felt much too ill to acknowledge his politeness—"it seems to me that it will be your wisest course to risk the journey. Now for your temperature."

"Most contradictory," he cried presently. "I can't make you out at all. It is only one degree above normal. I don't believe you are going to have the fever at all. I declare," turning slightly pale again, "mine is one degree above yours. Are we *all* going to have the fever?"

"You, at any rate, must keep clear of it," I said. "We should

A VERY ROUGH SKETCH OF IL TERENO.

have to send out to England for another doctor to attend to you. It would be a never ending affair, like The House that Jack built."

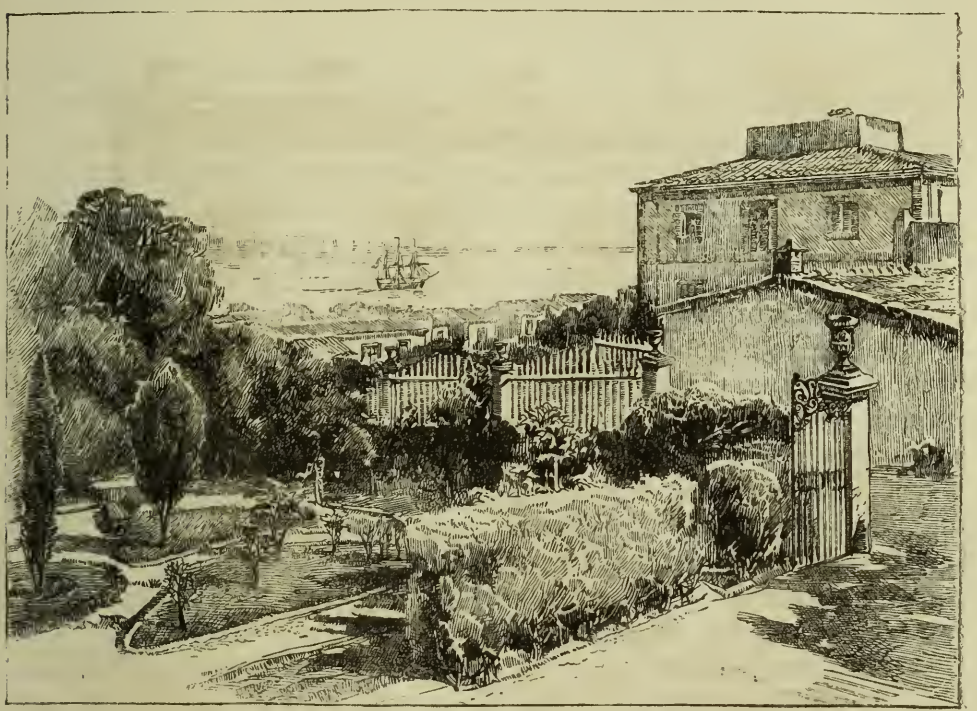
"Ah! I always thought that priest a lucky man in the old rhyme," said Dr. Fitzgilbert, very irreverently, under present circumstances. "No, I am not going to have the fever. Neither are you, in my opinion. Nevertheless, perhaps that is only an additional reason why you should leave to-day. Another night in that dungeon——"

"Be at ease," I interrupted. "I have spent my last night in the dungeon. And if ever I become a judge upon the bench, I shall think twice before passing sentence of solitary confinement upon anyone."

So it was settled. I was to say farewell to Palma, and go my way.

"And we must be up and doing," cried the doctor. "There is any amount of packing to be got through; bills, no doubt, to be paid; good-byes to be wished. The grass must not grow under our feet to-day."

"Good-byes, indeed," I returned. "That is always the worst of it. And first and foremost, I must go up to Il Tereno, to wish Mrs. Bateman good-bye. Mr. Bateman is at the Albufera, and I regret that I shall not see him. It is rare indeed to meet with such kindness as they have bestowed upon me ever since I first came to the island. There is Don Negro, too, who would certainly



A Nook in the Garden of Il Tereno.

send down a warrant of arrest if I embarked without taking an affectionate leave of his majesty."

We went out without further loss of time: went round by the cathedral and down the long flight of steps leading to the Bourne. I felt tame and dispirited, depressed and melancholy. This was so sudden a turn in the tide of one's affairs. The doctor rallied me.

"What's the matter?" cried he. "What have you done with all your life and spirit? You, who are always ahead of everyone, now flag behind. This won't do!"

But just then we came in sight of Enrico and his karrawakky, jumped in, and were whirled away up to Il Tereno. Mrs. Bateman was naturally surprised, both at the early visit and the approaching departure.

"It is all that wretched dungeon," she said. "I knew what it

would do for you, and warned you of the consequences. To sleep there night after night, perfectly alone, in the unhealthiest part of the town, was madness. No one could stand it very long; certainly no Englishman. We equally warned Mr. A. before ever he took the dungeon: but like all other men, he was obstinate and would go his own way."

I accepted the indirect charge very meekly. If Mrs. Bateman had told me just then that all men were cannibals, I should merely have said I was quite sure of it. What resistance could be expected from a man whose pulse was a hundred and forty, and who was under sentence of execution?—or of immediate departure from Palma, which came to the same thing.

"But you will not leave us to-day?" continued Mrs. Bateman. "I really think," after a moment's consideration, "that you are not going to have the fever. I believe that you are only suffering from the dungeon; the reaction of all you have gone through; the closeness of Palma air. Even the inhabitants themselves have to leave it in summer. If they cannot stand it, is it likely that an Englishman could do so—even with the most excellent and obstinate intentions in the world?"

"There is a good deal in that," said Dr. Fitzgilbert, who was no doubt thinking that his own temperature was two degrees above normal. "I suppose no Englishman could stand the climate out here very long?"

"Not in summer, and in Palma," replied Mrs. Bateman. "Take care of yourself, Dr. Fitzgilbert. You are a fresh comer, and more liable to mischief for that reason."

The doctor coughed and fidgeted. Of course Mrs. Bateman knew nothing of the two degrees above normal.

"And now," continued Mrs. Bateman, turning to me with a kindness I cannot describe, "if you leave to-day, I believe you will really be ill on the road. Anyone with a pulse galloping at a hundred and forty is in no condition to travel. Pray be advised. Come up here for a few days. Mr. Bateman will be home this afternoon, and we will take care of you. You know that we both start for England on Tuesday; and all being well, we can travel together. Dr. Fitzgilbert, don't you agree with me?"

"I do, indeed," replied the doctor. "It is the very best arrangement that could be made. I beg to second the resolution."

"Two against one," laughed Mrs. Bateman. "We have gained the day. And if after this you should have the fever, I shall give up my journey to England, and remain out here to nurse you."

"And so kill me outright with horror and remorse," I laughed. "Do you think that I could endure that for a moment? But I feel respited, and shall think no more of the fever. These few extra days with you and Mr. Bateman will make all the difference to my recollections of Palma."

But I felt overwhelmed with the kindness I was receiving. You know, my sister, there are some people who are angels in disguise, and Mrs. Bateman is one of them. No wonder that the peasantry and the poor of Mallorca all call her the Queen of the Island.

At this moment Don Negro came bounding up the steps and sailed into the room, and coming straight up to me, suddenly placed his front paws upon my knees, and looked earnestly into my face. If he could have spoken he would certainly have bid me remain; the expression of his face was not to be mistaken; and I accepted the omen.

I felt a new man as we returned to Palma. All these old familiar haunts which I had grown to love were still mine for a season. Yesterday we had discovered one or two new and very charming bits to photograph, and arrived at the Consulate we soon went forth again with our camera. We have given an hour to this regularly every morning. The work grows fascinating. The doctor is very good, too. Like H. C. he takes the greater share of the burden; carries the camera, does most of the work, whilst I attend to the intellectual part of the distraction. The doctor, like H. C., is much taken with the Palma ladies; but unlike H. C., he worships them at a distance. I have had no trouble with him. You will remember what I went through with H. C. in this respect; how he wasted his hours in the churches, admiring, adoring their picturesque forms and attitudes, pretending that he was studying pose and effect for artistic improvement.

He writes me word, by the way, that he is about to publish a poem of six hundred cantos upon this very subject. The world is generally slow to recognise genius, but this must prove a success. He tells me that he has dedicated it to me, which is absurd on the very face of it, will misdirect the public, and I shall receive a character I don't in the least deserve. I hastened to write back, declining the honour, and begging him to dedicate it to himself. But of course it may be too late. The book may be out, and the mischief done.

Besides our new discoveries, we photographed two important objects: the interior of the cathedral, and the prison cloisters of San Francisco. It was difficult to focus the interior. These dim religious lights are not intended for photography. But I think we hit upon a good idea. The doctor stood at some distance with a lighted candle, and when the flame was focussed, we felt we must be about right for the surroundings. In the end we obtained a most poetical result.

The cathedral was deserted. It always is so at this hour. One young woman came in and threw herself on her knees, about ten yards from us, close to a confessional box, evidently awaiting her father confessor. The doctor would have liked to act as proxy upon the occasion, but I did not consider him good enough to administer absolution. In the partial gloom she looked very picturesque; and

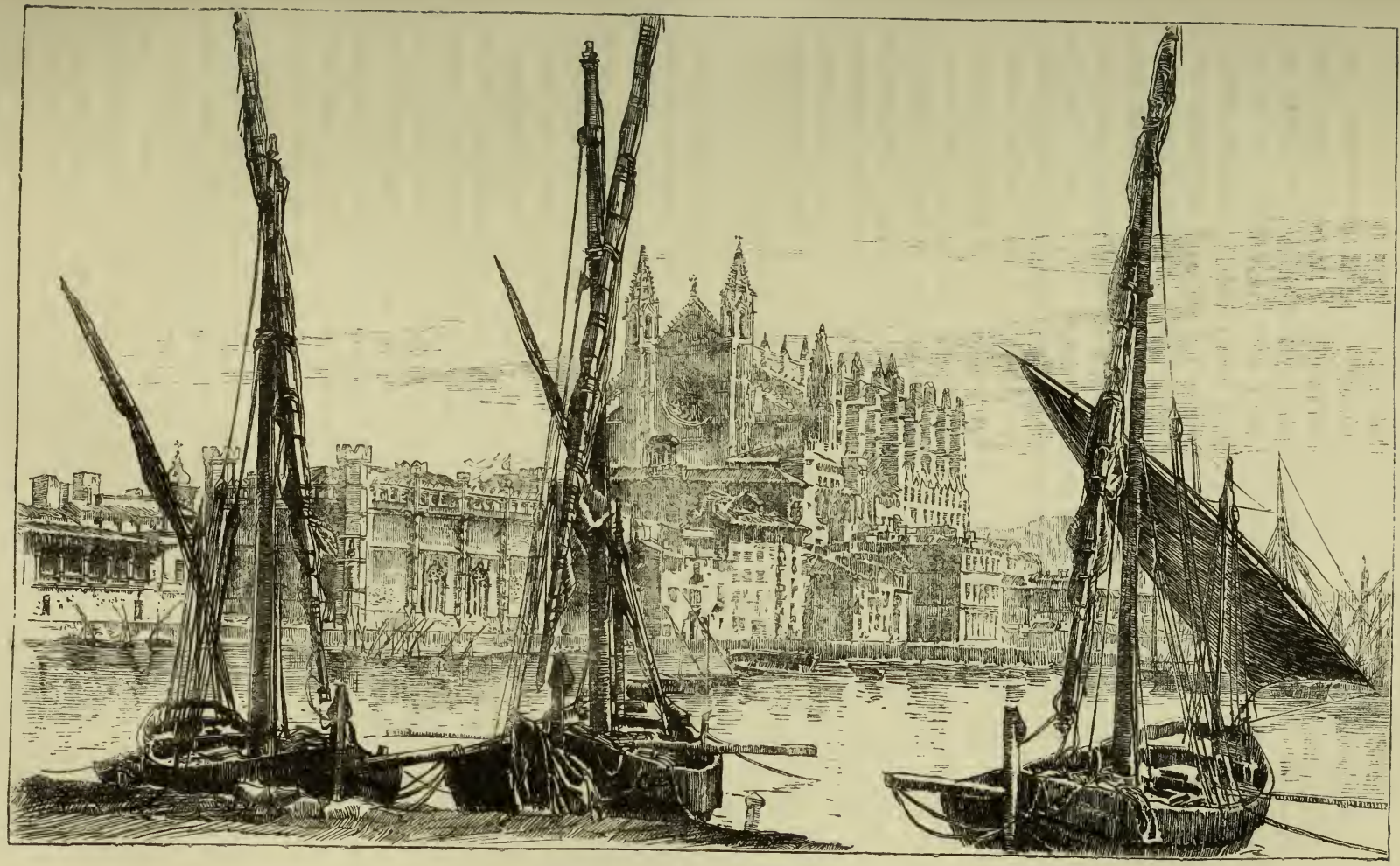
from her constant glances towards the doctor, I am quite certain that it was a case of thought-reading. She was quite ready to confess to him. It would have been much more interesting and romantic, no doubt, than to unburden herself to the fat old priest, who presently came shuffling along, and squeezed himself into the box with many a sigh and many a groan.

Of course the photograph required a long exposure, and the doctor proposed to spend the waiting moments in holding a reception with Don Jaime. We searched out the old sacristan, who appeared with his keys. The sarcophagus stands half-way between the high altar and the chancel: a plain marble monument surmounted by a metal crown.

The sacristan unlocked the receptacle, and drew out a long case or coffin with a glass lid. There lay the ghastly object, clad in tawdry robes of state, the skeleton face looking like a bronze mask green and rusted by exposure. The sacristan treated his charge with small respect. He, who in life, could chop off heads, or lead an army at will, in death had found his level. Yet he had played his part in the days gone by. It was he, too, who had founded the beautiful old church of Santa Ana, attached to the Moorish Palace: the most ancient relic of the past now existing in Palma. Man's work may survive, but he must go. "We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon."

We dismissed ourselves from the presence of Don Jaime, went back to our camera, packed up, and made for the cloisters of San Francisco. They were beautiful and refined as ever, and the prisoners welcomed us as old friends—a questionable distinction. They were not at all shy at being seen, and it was a small distraction for them. Probably they know very little about shame, and crime to them bears no very hideous aspect. Familiarity breeds contempt It is also more than likely that none of them are very desperate criminals: breaking possibly the eighth commandment, but never the sixth. The very cloisters themselves ought to restore them to a better frame of mind, only I suppose they are not susceptible to these refining influences. They came about us without ceremony, begged to be taken, wanted to see immediate results. The old Moorish minaret rising from the church in the North-West corner, and casting its shadow upon the cloisters, was a dream of Eastern beauty.

From this we went on to the dungeon. All A.'s old glass had been artistically arranged and was to be photographed that morning. I would not undertake anything so important, and the Palma photographer had taken up his great machine, half a yard square, for the purpose. This is so ponderous an affair that when he goes out into the country to take views, it requires two strong men to carry the machine, like the Ark in the days of old, and a donkey to bear the rest of the paraphernalia.



PALMA FROM THE HARBOUR.

We found the task successfully accomplished. I was promised a proof, and it is one of the last I shall enclose to you.

We went through into the garden. The fifty milliner young women had noticed an unusual commotion; strange voices, heavy footsteps; Catalina excitedly flying hither and thither. They took it into their heads that we were returning. A. was about to re-enter upon his reign. The dungeon would be restored to its palatial rank and dignity. You cannot imagine the uproar and excitement that was going on, unless you can imagine a hive of human bees swarming: any more than you can picture to yourself the frightful collapse that took place when the truth was gently broken to them. It was stagnation, syncope, swoons and hysterics. But as far as we are concerned, it is certain that the dungeon will never again be anything but a dungeon.

The next night was the 24th of June, and I must tell you of a curious custom they have here on that occasion.

During the day an immense stage had been erected in front of the Lonja. All day long small flags were flying from every window in the immediate neighbourhood, were hung across the streets from house to house. Rows of Chinese lanterns ran from pole to pole. Benches, enough to accommodate a small army, filled up the square surrounding the stage. It was a gay and lively scene.

When night had fallen, somewhere about eleven o'clock, the lanterns were all lighted, lights flashed from all windows, and windows were all crowded with heads. Everything was excitement. The stage was brilliant with coloured lights. Then men and women, in fantastic dress, mounted the stage and danced the dances of the country, sang songs and twanged guitars; turned themselves into effigies and dumb motions; seemed to go perfectly wild and mad in their acting. Coloured fires now and then blazed up and threw an extraordinary effect over the scene, upon the upturned faces. It was late before the excitement died away, the lights were extinguished, the wild populace hied it homewards, and peace was restored.

How universally something of this sort seems to be observed on St. John's night. Some time ago, being at St. Mary's, in the Scilly Islands, I strolled out one serene night in June, all unconscious of what was coming. Suddenly a noise rose on the air as of Pandemonium in revolt. Advancing down the hill, an immense crowd, furious and frantic, was propelling a barrel, whence issued tongues of flame and volumes of smoke. The lights and shadows thrown upon the faces, the glaring eyes and gaping mouths, completed the picture.

It required no hesitation to enter the first open doorway and take shelter. The flaming barrel, the mad crowd, the deafening roar, the tramp of an army, all tore past, as if bent on some awful vengeance, and made for the little harbour. Whether crowd and barrel and all, there plunged into the sea and cooled its ardour, I never knew.

But the next morning the town of St. Mary's was still standing, and everyone seemed clothed and in his right mind.

The Sunday after this midnight display in Palma, the town was again in excitement. This time it was of a religious order: the day of their grand procession. Soldiers lined the streets. Officers on horseback dashed about. The crowd was that of a multitude. Every window was thronged, every balcony, every low, flat roof. The ladies' dresses were fearfully and wonderfully made. It was a rainbow of millinery. But nature's rainbow makes no mistakes; its soft colours blend harmoniously. Here, all colours killed each other, and the greater the violence of the contrast, the finer the ladies thought themselves. The graceful mantilla was very much discarded, and towers of Babel, more or less out of the perpendicular, weighted with gorgeous and impossible flowers, dazzled one's vision on all sides.

It was a long procession; just what these processions always are. Crosses, images, crystals, banners, flags and flowers, gorgeous vestments, an innumerable company of priests. The whole resources of the cathedral had been taxed for the occasion. For some of the magnificent old lace, many of the ladies would no doubt have committed sacrilege. Mrs. Bateman explained to me the mysteries of Point and Brussels, Flanders and Old Spanish—I know not what. I listened to so much learning with that silent awe which, next to imitation, is said to be the sincerest flattery. If I had been quite sure of not being found out, I believe that I also should have committed sacrilege, for the sake of presenting it to one who so well understood and appreciated it: who would so far more have adorned it than those struggling old priests, who all looked as though they were performing a penance, and were certainly going through agonies of exertion.

The gentlemen, and especially the noblemen of the town, took part in the procession in evening dress. It is the custom in Palma to do this. Some went through with it as if it were the one object for which they lived. Others were irreverent, not to say wicked; laughed up at all the balconies, threw bywords to all the ladies of their acquaintance. The dignified old Bishop, supported by his Canons, was in great splendour.

When it had all passed away and the crowd with it, the streets looked melancholy and deserted; but they were fragrant with branches, and the odour of incense seemed to cling to the air.

Of course, the days of the dungeon are days of the past. These last few days and nights at Il Tereno have been inexpressibly soothing and delightful. With Don Negro I am greater friends than ever, and I doubt if he will permit us to leave the island without him. Day by day the heat seems to grow more intense, and it will do so for some time to come. With July the hottest period sets in. Our evenings on the balcony, our quiet talks under the night stars, with

the dark waters of the sea before us, bounded by the far-off lights of the town, are experiences to be remembered. Alas! to be remembered only, for all is over. I have seen my last sunrise in Palma.

In the sick-room everything progresses favourably. True, the improvement is fluctuating, and the telegrams are varied; but the ground, on the whole, is maintained, and the doctor tells me I may leave with a quiet mind. Everything will go on as now, until one fine morning a white-winged vessel, messenger of safety and deliverance, will glide into the harbour. Then, without an hour's loss of time, they will all embark and set sail homewards. The island will indeed be deserted. The small English colony will have broken up, and one Englishman alone will remain on the island to tell the tale.

And now I must lay down my pen. It is all over. With the excitement of departure is mingled the extreme sorrow of past and pleasant recollections. Many portions of my nights, whilst Palma slept, I have spent in writing to you, and amongst those recollections they are not the least delightful. I have held converse with you, have had your image constantly before me, and time and distance for the moment have seemed annihilated.

But there have been two distinct visions. The one, during a winter visit, when all was bright and the world was still fair. I pictured you surrounded by those social ties which make up the happiness of life; sheltered in the love and light of one who was infinite repose, infinite wisdom to us. But my summer vision has been clad in sable garments, sitting beside a vacant chair in a house left unto us desolate. A voice that was music is hushed, and eyes, the sweetest ever seen, are closed for ever. If this were all, then, indeed, all were over. But it is not, cannot be, all! Another day will dawn, and beyond the stars we shall recover all we have lost.

The last moment has come. The vessel in the harbour is ready for departure. I shall post this letter in Barcelona; it will give you not more than a day's warning of my return. Mr. and Mrs. Bateman are also leaving, and this will add infinitely to the pleasures of the journey. We are surrounded by sunshine; not a cloud is in the sky; the rainbow atmosphere was never more apparent than at this moment. But I cannot respond to it. Departures and farewells have something of death in them: another link in life's chain breaks and falls into the past; sadness seems to be the keynote of the moment. Fortunately it all passes away; new scenes, new impressions, take the place of the old. So we live out our days; and, if nothing else progresses, Time marches steadily onwards.

Then once more, Fare you well, my sister! My pen lingers over the word. I am loth to break the spell, and end for ever the pleasant hours of communion I have held with you in this sunny Palma de Mallorca. But it must come. Let it not, then, be Farewell, but a long Au revoir, sans adieu!

POSTSCRIPT.

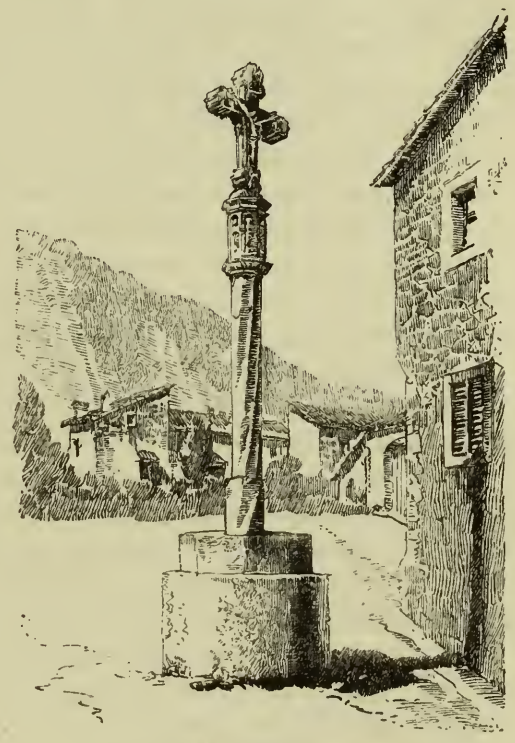
Christiania, Sept. 3, 1887.

MY DEAR E.—I have just received a letter from the doctor, in which he gives me a full account of their journey to England, and of A.'s complete restoration to health. As I know you were anxious for a final and satisfactory report, I hasten to enclose you an extract from the doctor's welcome pages.

"We remained longer in Palma than I had anticipated. There seemed some difficulty in sending out a yacht sufficiently large and satisfactory to meet all our necessities, and at length arrangements were made for one of the large steamers to call round here on her way home from the East. Nothing could have been better. There were not half a dozen passengers on board, and we practically had the vessel to ourselves.

"I cannot tell you with what eagerness we watched for her arrival. At length, one fine morning, we espied an immense steamer rounding the Point, and knew then that our hour had also come.

"A.'s state had continued fluctuating, but all danger was over. He was alarmingly weak, however, and one day in trying to walk a few steps from his room to the drawing-room, though well supported on both sides, he almost fainted. When we left, he had to be carried on board, but from that hour, he began to mend rapidly.



VALDEMOSA.

"We had a glorious run through the Bay and round the English coast. We tried to persuade the skipper to stop at Gibraltar and give us a day on shore, but he said time would not allow it. I confess that I should have liked to climb the old rock, and, perhaps, come across the old monkeys; but I daresay we should have been almost roasted alive with the heat. It certainly looked very much of a fiery furnace, and we consoled ourselves with the thought that after all we had not lost a very special excursion.

"A. improved daily, and we were a merry party on board. The days passed rapidly. All the weight and woe of our Palma errand and experiences disappeared as a summer cloud, and I believe

that everyone in his heart was sorry when we steamed into the Mersey. A. walked on shore, and glad and thankful I was to have been enabled to bring him home safe and sound. A special train awaited us, fitted up with all sorts of luxuries that he really no longer needed. Not many hours after that, we reached H., and my charge was over. All's well that ends well."

I think we shall both echo this concluding sentiment.

I am now in Northern latitudes, and nothing could be a greater contrast with the voluptuous atmosphere of Mallorca. I came here weak and washed-out, after the slight touch of gastric fever with which I reached you from Palma; and I daily grow in strength. Carl S. has been with me, and I may one day write you an account of our journey to the Rjukenfos, which was romantically begun by a long drive through the night.

But to-day I must content myself with fewer words. Carl has gone back to Germany, viâ Denmark, and E. O. has joined me. He is in the full flow of his student career. At this moment he is indulging me with strains from his zither, which he plays with great feeling, and for which he has quite a passion. I find it rather difficult to concentrate my eyes upon my letter and my ears upon the instrument; for E. exacts an opinion after each performance, and I have to be critical. So for this reason, as well as that the hour for making up the mails is at hand, I will say good-bye.

As I write, the rain is coming down in a deluge, and we are waiting fair skies and settled weather to continue our wanderings amongst the great waterfalls and fjords, the hills and valleys, and the endless pine forests of this exquisite and romantic Norway. The waters roar in their onward course, and the winds go whispering and sighing through the forest boughs, and this to me is sweetest music. In the midst of all these sights and sounds of nature I am in paradise; the burden of life for a moment loses its weight, the airs are balmy, the skies are blue, the sunshine is unshadowed, and the hours are laughing.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

A GHOSTLY TABLE-TURNING.

By W. W. Fenn.

OLD Peter Shale had systematically neglected the place for years before his death, and after the bitter quarrel with his son, on whom it was entailed, he took a wanton delight in destroying it. Never an amiable man in any relation of life, the moroseness of his nature seemed to find a welcome bent in reducing the value of the inheritance. He had long refused to have any repairs done to the house; the roof was leaky in a score of places, and from it down to the basement, the whole building became foul, damp and dilapidated. But worse, the windows were left open in all weathers, and broken panes never mended, whilst by degrees, the old owner removed certain substantial fixtures, thus impairing the very walls themselves. Nor did the little estate surrounding it fare any better. Gateposts, fences, stables and outhouses, were never made good, shrubberies and gardens grew into a wilderness, a renewal of the lease of an adjacent farm was refused, so that it shared the same fate. Such timber as he dared, the old master felled and sold, and by the time he carried off himself, his books, chemicals, and a few more belongings, to lodgings in a distant market town, a once valuable freehold had been reduced to less than half its worth.

A plain, substantial house of the last century, and of no great size, its chief attraction lay in the beauty of its wild and picturesque situation on one of the Western slopes of the Cotswold Hills. The conduct of its owner was not likely to pass without comment among the simple rural population of the country-side. Some merely set him down as mad, others roundly declared that he was "worse nor that." Dark rumours were rife as to compacts with the Spirit of Evil, due mainly to the eccentric habits and appearance of Mr. Shale. He was seldom seen except in a long sort of robe or dressing-gown, which, with a black velvet cap, surmounting his long grey hair, together with a beard to match, made him fulfil the popular idea of a magician. Moreover, having a propensity towards researches in chemistry, at which he worked frequently late into the night, he used to keep a light burning in the one room he retained as a laboratory and sanctum. This was situated on the ground floor, and its window, being at an accessible level with the drive, was convenient for curious eyes. The rickety outside shutters, although always closed after dark, offered little opposition to the investigators of old Shale's occupation. Consequently he was often watched at work

over his crucibles and retorts by such of the belated cottagers who, bolder than their fellows, ventured to peep in through the shutters, when on their way home they saw the light burning. A score of people could vouch for having seen him going through what they would have described as diabolical incantations had they been conversant with such words. This was quite sufficient therefore to justify the superstition that he had dealings with the other world.

When I first saw and heard the history of Warrenstow, as the place was called, it was entirely uninhabited, the old man having vacated it some eighteen months previously. The season was mid-December. I was desirous of making some studies for a winter landscape I had in contemplation; and the character of this district was exactly what I wanted. Thus I had taken up my quarters for a few days at a snug little village inn in the valley immediately below the desolate old house. The long evenings were beguiled by mine host with many a quaint anecdote connected with the neighbourhood. This was one of them; but the landlord did not state the cause of quarrel between father and son, nor does it matter. It is sufficient that whilst I was smoking my pipe with him in the sanded parlour, the talk amongst some of the villagers there assembled ran upon Mr. Shale, owing to a report having reached them that a light was shining in his room.

Such a thing, or any sign of life had not been visible there for nearly two years; not, indeed, since its owner left. Tom Martin, the wheelwright, had just come across the hill, and he saw it plain as a pikestaff; anybody else might see it, as chose to go and look; and what wonder? Tom Martin had prophesied all along that the old hulks wouldn't be got rid of quite so easy as some folks expected. No; no. Tom had always said he was a bad 'un, and what was to become of 'em all, if this sort o' thing was to go on, he couldn't tell.

Profound was the discussion at the Plough which this way of putting the question provoked. Master Baddock, the parish clerk —therefore, in some sense, a holy man—was naturally the fittest person to throw a doubt on Tom's eyes being able to see clear; and he inquired why that able-bodied handicraftsman hadn't gone up and looked in, and so have made quite sure what the light was caused by? Well! Tom admitted that he might have done *that*, but he didn't quite relish the job. All the time the old man was living there, he was ready to face him or any other man, but things were different now the house was empty. Who could say it was not filled with ghostes and spirits, after what had gone on there? And ghostes and spirits were not in his line. If any of the company liked to go up along with him, he was game to take a peep through the shutters, as he had done many a time before when he'd seen a light there. Who would go? This was practical, and like Tom Martin. Well, Master Baddock could tell them of one who would not go. There was every look of snow as night fell, and he was not going to pound up that hill in the cold and the dark, he could promise them, for the

sake of looking through a crack in a shutter: it was a matter for younger legs than his, and he'd recommend Bob Joyce, and young Silas Green, to try it. In fact, he should like to know for sartin: Tom was always for believing in ghostes, and it would be a good thing to show him there warn't no such gentry. Still the parish clerk doubted if either on 'em had the pluck.

This slur on the courage of the two sturdy young farm lads sitting a little apart from the group round the blazing log fire brought them to their feet. They were both ready to go, they asserted, if Martin would show the way with his lantern. Again, this was practical; so after a due amount of good-humoured chaff, the wheelwright expressed his willingness to be convinced, not but what he know'd it 'ud prove as he was right, and that it warn't no living Christian as would kindle a fire in that old house now. Yes! he would light his lantern again.

When he had done so, the three went forth into the night, followed at the last moment by another bold youngster, who could not stand the joking his hesitation brought him in for.

The draught of cold wind which their departure let into the room made us all draw the closer up to the wide chimney-corner. Glasses and mugs were replenished, pipes refilled, and the idle garrulity of such assemblies went on mainly in the direction of the expedition, and its probable result.

In about an hour the four adventurers returned, opening the door with a rush, their faces wearing an expression more of bewilderment than alarm—except Tom's, which looked downright scared.

"Why! it's the old man, his very self come back," were the first words uttered by Silas Green, in response to a chorus of inquiry.

"Yes, that it be'es, surely," chimed in Bob Joyce and their other mate; "we've all on us see'd him as plain as we ever see him—long old gownd, skull-cap and all, a-stooping over the fire just as he used."

"That's right," echoed Silas; "we three chaps anyway see'd the living man as we know'd him."

"Well, to be sure!" exclaimed Master Baddock, now for the first time much interested: "that be'es a strange sarcumstance to be sure!" Then, after a pause, during which his sentiments were echoed by the company in subdued tones, the parish clerk continued: "What can ha' brought the old man back? He must ha' got in very secret; nobody han't seen him about as I believe." Every head was shaken in agreement. "I suppose he didn't hear none of you agin the shutters?"

"No, no," was the reply; "we kept quiet enough, be sure: let alone as he couldn't have heard us moving on the snow, for it's come down pretty thick at last."

Tom Martin had sat down during this colloquy, deeply engaged in putting out the light in the lantern. Now he looked up, rose and came forward.

"I reckon," he said, "it isn't no use my saying as I don't believe on it, 'cos there ar'n't no means o' morticing old heads on young shoulders, nor o' dove-tailin' old eyes into young heads: but that there image as we see warn't no living Christian, I'll be sworn afore any justice in the county, and that I do say and that I'll stick to. It were a ghoste and nowt else."

The wheelwright's three companions here began to chuckle, and one or two of the company followed suit, notably Master Baddock. A few others, however, were silent for awhile, then they began to mutter that they wouldn't be sure Tom wasn't right.

The next day, however, there was no division of opinion. The social position of Tom Martin, the wheelwright, was entirely altered. Thenceforth he would be regarded in a very different light, for when the walking post had plodded his way along the now snow-encumbered roads, from the market town, it was known that old Peter Shale had died the previous afternoon just about the time the light was seen shining in his former room at Warrenstow. This left no doubt that it could not have been "the man hisself" that the explorers had beheld, and, therefore, as Tom triumphantly expressed it, "it must have been his ghoste, as he know'd it was all along."

A "sarcumstance" of this weird character and magnitude had to be speedily discussed, and consequently drew together quite a company to the Plough early in the afternoon.

Could I justly portray this scene of the wheelwright's triumph within reasonable space, I would strive to do so. As it is, I must advance matters to the moment when, soon after dark, there rushed into the room, spade on shoulder, young Silas Green. His chubby face this time was more comic than usual, being tinged with fright, and he was so out of breath, and so full of his news, that he quite gasped as he said:

"Well there, now! dang me if there bean't a light agen in t' old chap's room, a-shining as plain as ever; I ha' just see'd it!"

At this moment the door opened, and two or three more rustics entered, amongst them an aged dame, all bearing the same tidings, with the addition that several of them *had* actually peeped through the shutters, and could declare on oath they had seen the figure of the old man—that he was there now—sitting over the fire as usual. Not one of the witnesses doubted, therefore, any longer that the place was haunted, and that this could be nothing less than the ghost of Peter Shale. "In course, it stood to reason: directly he was dead, his ghost appeared in his old home: it was nat'ral, and the way with them gentry: what was to be done?"

Hitherto I had taken little or no part in the discussion, but here I uplifted my voice and said:

"My good friends, I don't, as a stranger, wish to put myself forward, but this is really all nonsense. Indeed, I do assure you there are no such things as ghosts, as I will prove to you, if two or three

of you will bear a hand, and come along with me up to the house, now—this minute. Whatever it is you have seen, I will undertake to face it. I will go into the house if I can get in, and clear up this ridiculous business; now, who will go with me?"

I have said nothing about the amusement this insight into rural simplicity and superstition had afforded me. But I thought the time had come when I might, without presumption, try and relieve these good people of their apprehensions and terrors. I rather fancied the notion of finding out what it all meant, and I was curious to see the upshot. By degrees, with a little persuasion, I induced Martin and his fellow explorers of the previous night to consent to go again. So after they had armed themselves with sticks and cudgels, we started, the wheelwright showing the way with his lantern. The night was fine and starlight, with a hard frost, but it was a heavy, slippery trudge, all up-hill. In less than half-an-hour, however, we were within measurable distance of the house; a bright gleam of light clearly marking its position. I at once advanced softly to the window and peeped through the shutters, my escort remaining a few paces in the rear.

Sure enough, there was a white-bearded, white-haired man, sitting crouching over a blazing log fire in the dilapidated grate of a wretchedly dilapidated, almost unfurnished room. He was smoking a short pipe, had a black skull cap on his head, and as far as I could see, certainly was dressed in a long, dark robe. But a little behind him, in the middle of the apartment, stood the explanation of the mystery. This was nothing more romantic than a travelling tinker and knife-grinder's barrow! There it was, apparatus and all: the little circular grindstones, the tap over them, the vice, the two treadles, the swinging perforated fire-pot, etc., everything complete. One glance was sufficient to show me this, and I quietly returned to my friends with the announcement. I pass over the incredulity with which it was received.

"Go and look for yourselves," I urged, but nothing would induce Tom to approach the window; "he'd seen enough 'afore." Nor was Silas Green much inclined at first; but at last he went forward with me, and saw what I saw. He was a humorous youth, and once convinced, was for having a lark with "t' old tinker." I, too, felt inclined to turn the tables on him, for I was young myself in those days. Without making a noise, we held a consultation as to how this could be done, and it was settled that I should watch through a crack what effect our operations would have. Silas Green was to go round to the back of the house, and make as hideous and unearthly a noise as he could invent, which was to be immediately taken up in the front by Bob Joyce and his mate, whilst I was to tap gently and mysteriously against the glass, which I could easily reach by thrusting my hand beneath the bulging shutter. This settled, we took our posts. In a few minutes, Silas raised a hollow, hideous

moan, which fell upon the stillness of the night with a truly weird effect. Silas was an artist in howls, evidently. His power was quite ventriloquial—probably acquired when a boy, by his practice as a scarer of birds. How he managed to make this noise, I cannot conceive, but it was just what was wanted. The effect was instantaneous: the old chap crouching over the fire started, looked up, then stood up, the instant the wailing moan was repeated in a deeper key by Joyce in the front, and then by his mate in a shrill echo. If they had practised it a score of times, they could not have done it better; they were experts.

Very amusing now became the looks and behaviour of the tinker. He took a step or two towards the window as I continued scratching at it. Then he went back to the fire, then to the door, his face each instant expressing more and more alarm. This was turning the tables admirably—the joke was going to perfection, and I wish I could adequately describe the scene. After a minute or two of bewildered amazement, the old fellow dashed out of the room, to re-appear in another moment at the front door, which hung, like everything else, loose upon its hinges. Then, out he rushed, plump into the arms of Tom Martin. There was a violent concussion, and the two fell sprawling in the snow. Picking themselves up, and without stopping to look about them, they each darted off in different directions headlong down the hill through the shrubbery, both hallooing at the top of their voices, "Murder—thieves," and other inarticulate words. The lantern Tom held, and which, with the brightness of the night, had enabled me plainly to discern these incidents, had been dropped, but not extinguished by the concussion, and whilst I was raising it amidst peals of "guffaw" from the two farm lads near me, we were joined by Silas. When he had enjoyed the joke sufficiently, we all four entered the room, only to fully realise what I had realised from the first.

The travelling tinker, knowing the house to be vacant, had snugly established himself in what he considered mere free quarters, with a view no doubt of passing his time there during the intervals of his itinerant occupation, and whilst the severe weather lasted. There were many evidences of his intention, and, with the Robinson-Crusoe-like aptitude of the nomadic classes, he had adapted everything he found to this end—notably, the remnants of a dilapidated wardrobe hanging in a cupboard in the room, which had been left behind by the old owner as worthless, and part of which the interloper was wearing.

I have never been near the spot since, but I heard that the heir entered on his property soon after, restored the dilapidations, and, in spite of Tom Martin's prophetic terrors, effectually put an end to the idea throughout the district that the place was haunted. My turning of the tables against the ghost had, however, been the first step in that direction.

THE INTERRUPTED SENTENCE.

"CHARLEY ROBERTSON is coming home next week," observed Mrs. Brown.

"You don't say so," exclaimed her mother, Mrs. Wilson. "Margaret, take care! You were just going to pour the milk instead of the hot water into the teapot. Is he coming home for good, then, Georgina?"

"Oh, no, only for a little holiday," replied Mrs. Brown. "He is getting on beautifully out there, you know, and has a large estate, and I don't know how many thousand sheep."

"What on earth does he want to come home for?" asked Mr. Wilson, with that inclination to disapprove of things in general which is one of the symptoms of suppressed gout.

"To see his family, I suppose, papa."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Mr. Wilson; "he had far better stop out and attend to his business."

"How can you say so?" protested Mrs. Wilson warmly; "think of his poor mother. Why, he has been away five years; five years this very month, I do believe."

"Georgina," said Mr. Wilson sharply, "that child of yours is trampling those geraniums to pieces."

"Dear me, so he is," said Georgina, looking up tranquilly from a little skirt she was embroidering. "Tommy! Tommy, darling! Margaret, would you mind fetching him, please."

They were all sitting on the little lawn, surrounded by flower-beds, and shut out from the dusty high road by walls clothed in ivy, and draped with roses, crimson, white and pink. It was the middle of June, and the sun was shining and the air was warm, and they were having tea out-of-doors. They made thus a pleasant little family group. Mrs. Wilson, who had been running about with her little grandson till she was flushed and exhausted, was now recovering her breath and her normal temperature in a big arm-chair, which she had wisely preferred to the more fragile garden seats. Mr. Wilson, who had joined the circle under protest, looked comfortable though discontented in the even more luxurious seat which had been provided for him. Georgina, the beauty, who always managed to look cool in the hottest weather, shone fresh and fair as the milk-white roses behind her, in her delicate light-coloured gown. Margaret stood in the centre of the group beside the wicker-work table, making tea for them all. She had not her sister's delicate features or wooing softness of expression. Still she was handsome in face as well as figure.

"If only Miss Wilson were not so thin in the face," people would say; "and had a little more colour, she would be quite as pretty as her sister."

"Ah! but she would never have Mrs. Brown's winning ways," somebody present was then certain to remark.

"By the by, Margaret," said Georgina, as her sister moved to go in pursuit of Tommy, "he must not have any cake: there are currants in it. You had better take it away at once, before he sees it."

It was too late. Tommy, having become suddenly conscious of the tea-table, came tearing across the lawn just in time to observe and to intercept this manœuvre. A debate ensued, conducted by Mrs. Brown, with alternate threats and caresses, and by Tommy with steady and stentorian crying, till at last a compromise was suggested by Margaret and accepted by both sides, whereby strawberry jam was to be substituted for cake. Mr. Wilson dilated on the folly of producing either, as equally poisonous to old and young. Mrs. Wilson, who had from the first openly sided with her grandson, embraced him sympathetically and comforted him with lumps of sugar dipped in cream, whilst Margaret went up to fetch the jam, of Mrs. Wilson's own making, from the store-cupboard.

"You will find it in the right-hand corner of the third shelf, just behind the sweet biscuits," cried Mrs. Wilson, and Margaret, departing, had answered yes, without hearing one word of the direction. Her thoughts were away, hovering over a little scene, in which she had played a part exactly five years ago. She saw it very clearly, but as a thing apart from her, in that book of past impressions we carry in our brains. Sometimes emotion so revives the hues of these pictures that they glow more vividly than the present and blot it from our minds. So was it with Margaret now. Standing in the store-room, with her hand laid mechanically on the thing she sought, she looked straight before her, seeing nothing of the tin boxes, brown earthenware jars and puce-coloured paper bags before her.

What she did see, and that with kindling interest, was a fine English park, the green of whose midsummer dress was brightened with white tents, fluttering flags and crowds of pleasure-seekers in gala attire.

It was that lovely hour of a hot summer day when the sun declines a little, and his radiance lessens. A delicious freshness began to mingle with the hay-scented air. The light grew richer, outlines softer and colours deeper, and over all things stole a glamour-like beauty which clear morning or dazzling noontide can never show. Far away, in the largest tent, people were dancing to a band, and the sound of their voices and of the music, merry though it was, seemed to gather from the evening air through which it filtered, a tinge of the sweetness which is near akin to pathos.

A young man and woman were walking together, apart from the others, in the shelter of a phalanx of gigantic limes.

He was saying to her:

"I only heard of your sister's engagement to Dr. Brown to-day. I have just been congratulating—well, I mean offering her my best wishes. He is a lucky fellow—a very lucky fellow."

"Yes," said the girl, simply. "So many people have admired Georgina."

"True," returned the young man, pronouncing the word with a curiously unassenting intonation. "But I did not quite mean that he was lucky because he was going to marry your sister, though, of course, he is—awfully so; but it isn't every man of his age who can afford to marry, however much he may want to."

"I suppose it is an expensive luxury in these days."

"I don't think a man has any right to ask a woman to marry him unless he can offer her a really comfortable home," he remarked.

The girl answered nothing, and the young man went on announcing these abstract truths with great earnestness of manner.

"That I am quite sure of; nothing would induce me to do it. But I am not quite so certain whether it is fair or not to ask a woman to engage herself to a man when there is no chance of their being married for years, especially"—here his voice grew less steady—"when he must spend those years far away from her—at the other side of the world, in fact."

He stood still as he finished these words, and so did the girl, looking outwardly cool and composed, and inwardly anxious, lest the beating of her heart, which seemed to shake and strangle her, should be evident to her companion.

"What do you think, Margaret?"

He had never called her Margaret before, and the tone in which he now did so seemed to show her for the first time all that his love might be. She made answer at last, in a voice that to herself sounded unnatural and far away:

"If the woman loved him ——" Then she paused for breath.

"Yes?" cried the man, drawing so near that she could not avoid for a moment the half-enraptured, half-timorous glance of his fine eyes.

"I think she would be very glad to wait for him. Don't you think we ought to go back to the marquee now?"

"Oh, Margaret," he said, seizing her trembling hands in his great strong clasp; "tell me, do you ——"

"Margaret! Margaret!" cried suddenly, from behind, the agitated voice of Mrs. Wilson. "For goodness' sake, come and help me find Georgina. Your papa is in such a way about keeping the horses. Whatever made him order the carriage so early, I can't think. Mr. Robertson, have you seen Georgina?"

It was impossible to think of anything else till Georgina was found, which she was at last, happy and tranquil as usual, emerging from the mansion with no less a person than the hero of the day himself, Mr. Frederick Elton, under whose distinguished guidance she had been

seeing the picture gallery and other public apartments of Barton Manor.

Margaret hardly realised whether it was Charles Robertson's hand or another's that helped her to her place, and only as, after a wild plunge, they were fairly on their way, tearing down the avenue in what seemed a wonderful silence, did she fully realise the significance of all that had happened—and not happened.

It was not an agreeable drive home. Mr. Wilson severely rebuked his errant daughter, and though the culprit herself was wholly unmoved by the attack, her mother imprudently undertook her defence.

By the time they reached home Mr. Wilson was in a fever of heat, and they had supper with the dining-room windows thrown open to the mild starless night. The white table, shining with lights and roses, looked like a little oasis in a great desert of darkness, but to Margaret it seemed as if she belonged to the darkness and was by some strange error included in the colour and the light.

"It's been a heavenly day," cried Mrs. Wilson. "I don't know that I ever enjoyed anything more; but I felt for Mrs. Robertson, poor dear, when I saw her with her son, and he starting for Australia at four to-morrow morning."

"What of that?" cried Mr. Wilson, mistaking the point of her picture. "At his age, I should have thought nothing of getting up at three."

"He is a shocking flirt, that young Robertson," said Georgina. "How he was going on with Clara Harrison!"

"He was only dancing with her," remonstrated Doctor Brown; "and I don't think he danced with her more than with anyone else."

"It is not Clara Harrison he's thinking of," said Mrs. Wilson, who rather prided herself on her discernment in such matters. "If he admires anyone, it is Laura Cole."

"Why, mamma! that fright!" said Georgina. "What makes you think so?"

"Never mind," said Mrs. Wilson, with admirable discretion. "I have my reasons. Doctor Brown, help yourself to some more wine. Why, Margaret, you look like a ghost."

"I have a headache," said Margaret, faintly, rising to her feet. "I think I'll go to bed."

"Have some wine first," anxiously suggested her father, whose heart was as warm as his temper.

She escaped at last, struggling bravely against her tears, from their kindness and condolences, and shut her bedroom door behind her with a sense of immense relief. All night long she repeated to herself the assurance that if he really wished to finish his question there was still time to do so. Towards dawn, youth mastered pain, and she fell into an uneasy slumber. She was roused from it by the sound of wheels upon the road outside; the road that led to Lea-

church and the station. She sprang from her bed, and pushing aside her blind looked out into a cloudless morning, bathed in amber light and shimmering dew. The Robertsons' dog-cart went whirling past.

She had only a passing glimpse of it, for her window was at right angles to the road, and the field of her vision narrowed by the house itself on one side and a group of elms on the other. She was just able to see Charles Robertson, or rather to see that he was driving, with the old man-servant beside him, and then he was gone, in a flash.

The noise of the wheels died away in the distance. He had actually departed, then, and made no sign.

But perhaps he had left a message which might be delivered to her that day, or perhaps he would write one before he sailed, which would reach her on the morrow. During these two long feverish days her hope sank gradually, and on the evening of the second it died. "It was all a terrible mistake," thought Margaret. "The question was not what I thought it was. He was thinking not of me, but of someone else—Laura, perhaps."

Then came a time of terrible aching pain, which seemed to drain the blood from her veins and the strength from her limbs. Nobody could imagine what was the matter. Mr. Wilson prescribed tonics, and Mrs. Wilson crochet, as much less exhausting to the brain than the books Margaret was too fond of poring over. Dr. Brown, with his kind eyes resting thoughtfully on his sister-in-law, advised change of air and scene, and no doubt in that counsel did her good service.

The sea-breeze and the sea-sights refreshed and strengthened her for the struggle by which alone such a nature as hers attains repose. With one supreme effort she adjusted herself to this new and at first repellant view of life, as a work to be achieved rather than a pleasure to be enjoyed. She was born just a little too soon, she lived in too old-fashioned and narrow-minded a circle to find consolation, and more than consolation in that working-world now so thronged with women. She went back bravely to the dull life of her own home, which left unexercised so much within her, determined to fulfil faithfully such work as she could find there. And before long, waiting on her parents and stitching for Georgina and her babies, she became not only resigned, but happy as a creature so healthful in mind and in body was bound to be.

Still in those rare moments when she paused to think of herself and her feelings, she was compelled to acknowledge that existence had never looked the same that it did just before Charles Robertson went away. As she had instinctively divined it would be, no one ever took the place he once had held in her heart. The question now was whether he himself could have resumed it if he would; so utterly had the old feeling for him vanished. Laura Cole was

married, and so was Clara Harrison, and no rumour of his engagement had ever reached them. Supposing it were possible that he should love her; was it possible that she could love him in return?

This was the query she put to herself, standing as before described, amidst these prosaic surroundings of the store-room. She tried to conjure up Charley's face as it had looked that day five years ago; and the misty image moved her not a whit. She laid her hand, as it were, upon the old scar, and did not wince. All that she felt for him, all that she had suffered, was not only over, but it was now inconceivable to her. Not merely had her love died, but, so at least she now decided, the power of loving had died with it.

But by this time Tommy's patience had been tried to its uttermost, and it was his cries which suddenly put all these dreams and questionings to flight.

When she came downstairs she found the whole family elated by a piece of news communicated by Doctor Brown, who had called to pick up his wife and son on his way home from paying a professional visit to Barton Manor.

"Only think, Margaret," cried Mrs. Wilson, "Mr. Elton is going to be married to Lady Clara Downes on the twenty-seventh, Wednesday fortnight; his twenty-sixth birthday; and there's to be such a to-do; just as there was five years ago when he came of age. You must have a new dress, and I think I shall have my orange and green stripe done up."

"We shall have to make a new suit for Tommy," said Georgina.

"Oh, we shan't take Tommy," said his father. "The day will be too long for him, and it will only make him abominably cross."

"He might come home early with grandpapa," suggested Mrs. Brown.

"Come home early with grandpapa," repeated Mr. Wilson, contemptuously. "Grandpapa is more likely to be in his grave than anywhere else by the twenty-seventh."

"Don't talk in that light way about dying," cried Mrs. Wilson, reprovingly.

"What do you mean by light way?" shouted Mr. Wilson with excusable indignation.

"You must go, dear," interrupted Margaret. "You are the oldest tenant, you know. Sir Edwin would miss you. Don't you remember the pretty speech he made about that the last time he was here?"

During the next two weeks Margaret observed, not for the first time in the last five years, that she was growing old, and in doing so, leaving others, even her elders, behind. She was led to this conclusion by the striking contrast between the excitement of her mother and sister over the approaching festival and her own complete indifference. As she arrayed herself for it when the great day came, she could not but contrast, half sadly, half wonderingly, her present

mood with that of a like morning five years ago. Fortunately it was a radiant day. The entertainment was to begin with the arrival of the bride and bridegroom at half-past three, so the Wilsons lunched early, in order to start precisely at two, which would ensure their arriving only half-an-hour too soon. For, as Mrs. Wilson observed, they must drive to Leachurch first to fetch Georgina and Tommy.

"What folly," cried Mr. Wilson, who, as he had always predicted, was too ill to go: "seeing Brown has horses of his own."

"They are both so busy," said Mrs. Wilson. "Besides, his carriage isn't quite so well appointed as ours, Georgina says."

"Oh, indeed! And so ours is to do an extra three miles to suit Georgina's grand notions. Well, you needn't go there and back, weighing down the poor beasts. The carriage can fetch Georgina."

"I don't think Georgina would like that," said Mrs. Wilson. "She will want someone to help her control Tommy. The dear child is so wild with delight when he goes out driving that he can't keep still for an instant."

"If he scratches the paint, mind, he shan't go out again in it," cried Mr. Wilson.

However, when they reached the Browns' little house at Leachurch, they found the day's programme materially altered. Georgina appeared upon the doorstep, looking very lovely and a trifle disquieted, in a new and very elegant gown.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, "I am afraid I shall not be able to go!"

"Not go?"

"No. Tommy is not very well. He has a little breaking-out on his face. It's nothing serious, but it makes him look such a fright, I couldn't possibly take him. But he is so disappointed and fretful, I hardly like leaving him with Anne, who never can manage him."

"I'll stay with him," said Margaret, descending from the carriage. "I should like to; I don't care a bit about the fête."

"Well, perhaps that would be the best way," said Georgina pleasantly. "You don't care for that kind of thing, I know, and it really would be a pity not to wear my new dress after getting it on purpose."

Mrs. Wilson was so concerned about her grandson, and so disappointed at his not being of the party, that it was not till she and Georgina were well on their way that it occurred to her that Margaret's gown would now have been procured in vain.

Margaret herself remained unconscious of this detail. She tied one of Georgina's aprons over her lace-bedizened skirt, and prepared readily and cheerfully to play the part of nursemaid. She had, indeed, little less than a genius for the management of children, made up, as genius mostly is, of equal parts of capacity and love. The society of children was at all times exhilarating to her, even when they were what other people called disagreeable. When they were at

their best she enjoyed something like beatitude in their company. This devotion did not, however, express itself in servile adulation, but in a sweetness of manner preserved from mawkishness by a due admixture of firmness and even, at times, indifference.

As now, for instance, when Tommy was raging and rolling on the floor, and Margaret, feigning perfect forgetfulness of his presence, took the younger and more amiable Sissy in her lap, and described to her a delightful substitute for the unattainable gaieties at Barton Manor. They would all three have tea in the garden. Even Tommy's emotion was soothed by this dazzling prospect, and he had soon forgotten his regrets in all the bustle of the preparation. For not the least advantage of this brilliant conception, or rather of its execution, was the amount of labour it involved. All the materials for the feast had, of course, to be conveyed from the house to the garden, and, as the children were not allowed to carry more than one article of food or of china at once, the process occupied a considerable time, and might indeed have lasted till sundown, if Tommy's perseverance had not earlier given way and Margaret been impelled to come to the aid of the weary but unrelaxing Sissy. But by five o'clock the banquet was in readiness, and the tea party took their places.

It was an entirely delightful repast. The children's faces beamed with rapture, and Margaret herself, drinking her tea with a parasol in one hand, and waving her handkerchief every now and then to disperse a cloud of gnats, enjoyed a reflected glow of pleasure.

Aunt Margaret beamed upon the children and fell into a kind of dream.

There was indeed something dreamy in the hour, glowing with afternoon heat, and drowsy with the hum of insects near and far. No boundary of house or wall was visible; only a tall barrier of larkspurs kindling into sapphire flame when the light touched them, and screen upon screen of pale green apples, leaves enwrought with a delicate mosaic of dazzling light and clear-cut shadow. It was no commonplace garden in too familiar Leachurch, but a maze of living green and gold interwoven—fit background for the bright child faces beside her.

To Margaret it seemed then as if life might pass pleasantly enough if time and the sun would now stand still. She was happier with the children than with any other of her kin. Kind and beloved as they were, they were separated from her by a barrier which no one's sympathy had ever crossed—save that of one; years ago. So long as the children were children, it was well enough; but what would it be when they grew up and left her? Her future seemed suddenly to stretch before her: a dreary, dusty highway, through a flat and leafless land, and her heart shrank within her at the prospect.

Then a little warm finger touched her hand. Sissy, even then inspired by the fine tact which in after years so quickly detected, so skilfully healed, heart-achings, had dimly perceived that Aunt Mar-

garet seemed to be crying without tears, and instantly longed to comfort her. She had slipped unperceived from her chair and gathered a little bouquet of daisies with the shortest possible stalks, which she now presented to her aunt, in a crumpled little bunch, with the most winsome smile and a look half inquiring, half appealing, from her loving brown eyes. Margaret caught the child to her heart in a burst not only of gratitude and affection, but of relief. We are all of us at times involuntarily superstitious, and a curious and unreasonable presentiment of happiness flashed over Margaret, as if the fresh flowers offered to her just at that special moment by the sacred hand of a little child were an encouraging token from destiny herself.

Anne came tearing down the garden walk in such a hurry that her cap stood straight on end.

"The carriage has come back for you, Miss Margaret," she cried excitedly. "With this note."

It was a half-sheet of note-paper, on which was a scrawl in pencil.

"DEAR MARGARET,—Do come here (to Barton) at once. Papa is wild at your not being here. Never mind Tommy.

"Your affectionate sister, GEORGINA."

Margaret was in the carriage and off before the children had quite mastered the full import of this interruption, and when she looked back to kiss her hand to them she saw through the window Tommy's face purple and distorted with angry grief, beside Sissy's smiling and benignant little countenance.

The horses though less fleet than of old, went briskly over the two miles between Leachurch and Barton. The village was all bedecked with flags and garlands, and a gorgeous triumphal arch inlaid with good wishes, inscribed in shining letters, spanned the entrance to the park. Then Margaret descended and moved across the sward, searching with her eyes on all sides for her own people.

At last she beheld Mr. Wilson and Georgina, with a group of which Lady Clara herself was the centre. Mrs. Wilson detached herself for a moment from this galaxy to address her daughter.

"Oh, Margaret, my dear, I am thankful to see you. Your papa has been in such a way about your being left behind, I can't tell you; regularly raging at Georgina, and saying you were always put upon."

"But I thought papa was too ill to come?"

"And so did everybody else," cried Mrs. Wilson indignantly. "Really he would try a saint. It makes one look such a fool. There was I telling Sir Edward and everybody that he was in bed, so bad with the gout he could hardly move, and there he is walking about as well as anyone; came over in Mr. Smith's dog-cart. There, I mustn't wait. You'd better go and find him, Margaret. He is up near the dancing tent. I can't wait now, Lady Clara is going to show us her jewelry."

Margaret went slowly and pensively onward over the sun-browned turf, and passed group after group of venerable trees. All about were the same flags, and tents, and gay crowds that there had been five years ago. The same music or something strangely like it filled the air. There was the same glow in the west. The same haze of mingled light and colour over everything. So striking was the likeness that Margaret felt as if she had resumed an unfinished dream. Only one thing was changed utterly, and that was herself; so much so that she felt like a ghost who vainly haunted the places where once she had been alive and happy.

"What a handsome girl," somebody carelessly observed to a tall, broad-shouldered, sunburnt man, who stood beside him. "Do you know who she is, Robertson?"

But the man addressed, instead of answering, suddenly left the side of the questioner and went striding after the woman of whom he spoke.

He intended to address her quietly and ceremoniously, with a due observance of conventional decorum, but when she, hearing his quick steps behind her, turned suddenly upon him the face that all these interminable years he had been hungering to see again, his usual reserve gave way before a burst of uncontrollable feeling.

"Where have you been?" he cried, catching her hands in his with a vehemence of manner that might be mistaken for anger. "I only arrived last night, or I should have been over to see you. I made sure I should see you here. I came early on purpose. I have been waiting and looking and hoping for you the whole—all these five years."

Margaret made no answer. She stood perfectly still and became deadly white, with her dark eyes riveted so strangely on him, that a horrible suspicion came over him that he had startled her brutally, and that she was about to faint in consequence.

"Oh, Margaret," he exclaimed, in a voice of the humblest penitence, "I beg your pardon. I have frightened you. You are ill."

Even then she could not speak, but she did not withdraw her hands.

"No," she said at last, in a very low voice, smiling feebly as the colour crept slowly back to her cheeks and lips; "I am not ill; I am only ——"

She paused, and that sentence, indeed, was never finished, then or after. To her dying day Margaret was never able to explain satisfactorily to herself, far less to anyone else, the transformation she seemed then to undergo. Whom shall we know, if not ourselves? Two minutes before she would have sworn, and believed, that Charles Robertson was nothing to her but a friend, like other friends, and that the love she once had borne him had vanished as irrevocably as the five years since last they met. And, behold, at the first sound of his voice and the first sight of his face, she and everything else had

changed. It was just the same as of old. There was no one like him. In his lightest look and gesture there was a charm which she could not define or explain; which she could only feel; half wondering at her own subjection to the exquisite fascination. Love him! It seemed to her that she loved him far, far more than she had ever done, with a love deeper, more passionate, more humble and unselfish. She had desired to be his wife; now it seemed to her that merely to bask in his presence was bliss of which she was all unworthy. Had they stood in the Palace of Truth, instead of in a world where we may so rarely discover ourselves, she would have thrown herself at his feet to say, with Miranda,

> "To be your fellow
> You may deny me; but I'll be your servant."

Little could poor Charles, trembling between hope and fear, divine of all this from her white face, her quivering lips, her—to him—alarming silence. Yet something of her feeling was translated in the almost beatified look which at last stole over her rapt face, and he, taking courage, began:

"Margaret, do you remember our conversation this day five years ago, when we talked about marriage and engagements, and I asked you if you thought it fair in a man to ask a woman to engage herself to him for a long time? Do you remember what you said: that if a woman loved a man she would be content to wait? These were your very words. I've repeated them over to myself a thousand times since. You said them so coldly, I have never been able to make out, thinking of them all these years, how much or how little you meant by them. And then, Margaret, do you remember I asked you the question I was never allowed to finish? I said, Margaret, tell me ——"

"Margaret! Margaret!" Mr. Wilson's voice was heard calling from the tent.

"No, by heaven, you shall not move till you have heard and answered this question. Tell me, do you love me; will you be my wife?"

And Margaret, then and there, gave herself into his keeping for ever. And, alone as they were and under the sheltering trees, he folded her to him in a passionate embrace, and sealed the compact with his first kiss.

LOVE'S COST.

Love filled my cup with tears and wine;
I drank the mingled draught divine—
Glad to the soul that it was mine.

Love crowned my head with thorn and rose;
Such wreaths of rose no thorns disclose,
Only the happy wearer knows.

Love gave one ashes, gave one bread,
Fed on the soul that on it fed,
And kissed my heart until it bled.

Love gave me sunlight, gave me rain,
My only pleasure, only pain,
My only loss, my only gain.

Yet did the gain so far outweigh
The infinite loss, that till to-day
I never wished my pain away.

Because I thought that you, at least,
Wore only roses at our feast,
And heard a song that never ceased.

But now I know that you, as I,
Hear knells in all our revelry,
And, not for passion only sigh;

That you, too, bear a heavy cross,
And sway 'twixt sense of gain and loss,
And, rent by tempests, turn and toss,

I know not whether, for your sake,
I would not choose this chain to break,
And—dream bereft—meet life awake.

And you—what would you choose? Who knows?
Since each one to the other shows
Only the wine—the smile—the rose.

Ah, love of mine—to you, to me—
Love's martyrdom must welcomed be—
The price of Love's Eternity.

E. Nesbit.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. J. SWAIN.

"IT IS SO HOT AND UGLY," SHE EXCLAIMED IN TONES OF EXCUSE;
"I SIT WITHOUT IT WHEN I AM ALONE."

THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1888.

THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XVI.

LEAH'S STORY.

OUR dismayed faces might have formed a study for a painter, as we stood in my room in Essex Street: the doctor, George Coney, Lennard, and myself. On the floor between the hearthrug and the desk, lay the dead man, the blaze of the fire and the gas-lights playing on his features. Mr. Brightman was dead. In my mental pain and emotion I could not realise the fact; would not believe that it was true. He had died thus suddenly, no one near him; no one, so far as was yet known, in the house at the time. And to me, at least, there seemed to be some mystery attaching to it.

But, at this particular moment, we were looking for George Coney's sovereigns, which Mr. Brightman, not much more than an hour before, had locked up in the deep drawer of his desk, returning the keys to his pocket. After Dr. Dickenson had handed me the keys I unlocked and opened the drawer. But the bag was not there.

If the desk itself had disappeared, I could not have been more surprised. Lying in the drawer close to where the bag had been, was a gold watch belonging to Mrs. Brightman, which had been brought up to town to be cleaned. That was undisturbed. "Coney," I exclaimed, "the money is not here."

"It was put there," replied young Coney. "Next to that watch."

"I know it was," I answered. I opened the drawer on the other side, but that was full of papers. I looked about on the desk; then on my own desk, even unlocking the drawers, though I had had the key in my own pocket; then on the tables and mantelpiece. Not a trace could I see of the canvas bag.

"What bag is it?" inquired Dr. Dickenson, who, of course, had known nothing of this. "What was in it?"

"A small canvas bag containing some gold that Mr. George Coney had wished to leave here until Monday," I answered.

"'Twas one of our sample barley bags; I happened to have it in my pocket when I left home," explained the young man. "My father's initials were on it: S. C."

"How much was in it?" asked Lennard.

"Thirty pounds."

"I fear you will be obliged to go without it, after all," I said, when I had turned everything over, "for it is not to be found. I will remit you thirty pounds on Monday. We send our spare cash to the bank on Saturday afternoons, so that I have not so much in the house: and I really do not know where Mr. Brightman has put the cheque-book. It is strange that he should have taken the bag out of the drawer again."

"Perhaps it may be in one of his pockets," suggested the doctor. "Shall I search them?"

"No, no," interposed George Coney. "I wouldn't have the poor gentleman disturbed just for that. You'll remit it to me, Mr. Strange. Not to my father," he added, with a smile: "to me."

I went down with him, and there sat Leah at the bottom of the stairs, leaning her head against the banisters, almost under the hall lamp. "When did you come in, Leah?" I asked.

She got up hastily, and faced me. "I thought you were out, sir. I have come in only this instant."

"What is the matter?" I continued, struck with the white, strange look upon her face. "Are you ill?"

"No, sir, not ill. Trouble is the lot of us all."

I shook hands with George Coney as he got into his cab, and departed; and then returned indoors. Leah was hastening along the passage to the kitchen stairs. I called her back again. "Leah," I said, "do you know what has happened to Mr. Brightman?"

"No, sir," answered she. "What has happened to him?"

"You must prepare for a shock. He is dead."

She had a cloth and a plate in her hand, and laid them down on the slab as she backed against the wall, staring in horror. Then her features relaxed into a wan smile.

"Ah, Master Charles, you are thinking to be a boy again to-night, and are playing a trick upon me, as you used to do in the old days, sir."

"I wish to my heart it was so, Leah. Mr. Brightman is lying upon the floor in my room. I fear there can be no doubt that he is dead."

"My poor master," she slowly ejaculated. "Heaven have mercy upon him!—and upon us! Why, it's not more than three-quarters of an hour since I took up some water for him."

"Did he ask for it?"

"He rang the bell, sir, and told me to bring up a decanter of water and a tumbler."

"How did he look then, Leah? Where was he sitting?"

"He was sitting at his table, sir, and he looked as usual, for all I saw, but his head was bent over something he was reading. I put some coals on the fire and came away. Mr. Charles, who is up there with him?"

"Dr. Dickenson, and ——"

A knock at the door interrupted me. It proved to be the other doctor I had sent for.

The medical men proceeded to examine Mr. Brightman more closely. I had sent for the police, and they also were present. I then searched his pockets, a policeman aiding me, and we put their contents carefully away. But there was no bag containing gold amongst them. How had it disappeared?

A most unhappy circumstance was that I could not send for Mrs. Brightman, for I did not know where she was. Mr. Brightman had said she was out of town, but did not say where.

When Watts came home, I despatched him to the house at Clapham, allowing him no time to indulge his grief or his curiosity. Leah had knelt down by Mr. Brightman, tears silently streaming from her eyes.

The fire in the front room was relighted; the fire, the very coals, which he, poor man, had so recently taken off; and I, Lennard and Arthur Lake went in there to talk the matter over quietly.

"Lennard," I said, "I am not satisfied that he has died a natural death. I hope ——"

"There are no grounds for any other supposition, Mr. Strange," he interrupted. "None whatever. *Are* there?" he added, looking at me.

"I trust there are none—but I don't quite like the attendant circumstances of the case. The loss of that bag of money causes all sorts of unpleasant suspicions to arise. When you came to the house, Lennard, did you go straight upstairs?" I added, after a pause.

"No, I went into the front office," replied Lennard. "I thought Sir Edmund Clavering might still be here."

"Was Leah out or in?"

"Leah was standing at the front door, looking—as it seemed to me—down the steps leading to the Thames. While I was lighting my candle by the hall-lamp, she shut the front door and came to me. She was extremely agitated, and ——"

"Agitated?" I interrupted.

"Yes," said Lennard; "I could not be mistaken. I stared at her, wondering what could cause it, and why her face was so white—almost as white as Mr. Brightman's is now. She asked—as earnestly as if she were pleading for life—whether I would stop in the house for a few minutes, as Mr. Brightman had not gone, while she ran out upon an errand. I inquired whether Sir Edmund Clavering was upstairs, and she said no; he had left; Mr. Strange was out, and Mr. Brightman was alone."

"Did she go out?"

"Immediately," replied Lennard; "just as she was, without bonnet or shawl. I went up to your room, and tapped at the door. It was not answered, and I went in. At first I thought the room was empty; but in a moment I saw Mr. Brightman lying on the ground. He was dead even then; I am certain of it," added Lennard, pausing from natural emotion. "I raised his head, and put a little water to his temples, but I saw that he was dead."

"It is an awful thing!" exclaimed Lake.

"I can tell you that I thought so," assented Lennard. "I knew that the first thing must be to get in a doctor; but how I found my way up the street to Dickenson's I hardly remember. No wonder I left the front door open behind me."

I turned all this over in my mind. There were two points I did not like—Leah's agitation, and Lennard's carelessness in leaving the door open. I called in one of the policemen from the other room, for they were there still, with the medical men.

"Williams," I began, "you saw me come down the street with my latchkey in my hand?"

"I did, sir, and wished you good evening," replied Williams. "It wasn't long after the other gentleman," indicating Lennard, "had run out."

"I did not see you," cried Lennard, looking at him. "I wish I had seen you. I wanted help, and there was not a soul in the street."

"I was standing in shadow, at the top of the steps leading to the water," said the man. "You came out, sir, all in a hurry, and went rushing up the street, leaving the door open."

"And it is that door's having been left open that I don't like," I observed. "If this money does not turn up, I can only think some rogue got in and took it."

"Nobody got in, sir," said the policeman. "I had my eye on the door the whole time till you came down. To see two folk running like mad out of a quiet and respectable house roused my suspicions; and I went up to the door and stood near it till you entered."

"How did you see two running out of it?" I inquired. "There was only Mr. Lennard."

"I had seen somebody before that; a woman," replied the officer. "She came out, and went tearing down the steps towards the river, calling to someone out of sight. I think it was your servant, Mrs. Watts, but I was only half-way down the street then, and she was too quick for me."

"Then you are quite sure no one entered?"

"Quite sure, sir. I never moved from the door."

"Setting aside Williams's testimony, there was scarcely time for anyone to get in and do mischief," observed Lake. "And no one could take that gold without first getting the keys out of Mr. Bright-

man's pocket," he rejoined. "For such a purpose, who would dare rifle the pockets of the dead?"

"And then replace the keys," added Lennard.

"Besides," I said impulsively, "no one knew the money was there. Mr. Brightman, myself, and George Coney were alone cognisant of the fact. The more one thinks of it, the stranger it seems to grow."

The moments passed. The doctors and the police had gone away, and nothing remained but the sad burden in the next room. Lennard also left me to go home, for there was nothing more to be done; and Arthur Lake, who had gone round to his rooms, came in again. His conscience was smiting him, he said, for having deserted me. We sat down in the front room, as before, and began to discuss the mystery. I remarked, to begin with, that there existed not the slightest loophole of suspicion to guide us.

"Except one," said Lake quietly. "And I may pain you, Charley, if I venture to suggest it."

"Nonsense!" I cried. "How could it pain me? Unless you think I took it myself!"

"I fancy it was Leah."

"Leah?"

"Well, I do. She was the only person in the house, except Mr. Brightman. And what did her agitation mean—the agitation Lennard has referred to?"

"No, no, Arthur; it could not have been Leah. Admitting the doubt for a moment, how could she have done it?"

"Only in this way. I have been arguing it out with myself in my rooms: and of course it may be all imagination. Leah took up some water, she says, that Mr. Brightman rang for. Now it may be that he had the drawer open and she saw the money. Or it may even be that, for some purpose or other, he had the bag upon the table. Was he taken ill while she was in the room? and did she, overcome by temptation, steal the money? I confess that this possibility presents itself forcibly to me," concluded Lake. "Naturally she would afterwards be in a state of agitation."

I sat revolving what he said, but could not bring my mind to admit it. Circumstances—especially her agitation—might seem to tell against her, but I believed the woman to be honest as the day.

There is not the slightest doubt that almost every man born into the world is adapted for one especial calling over all others; and it is an unhappy fact that this peculiar tendency is very rarely discovered and followed up. It is the misdirection of talent which causes so many of the failures in life. In my own case this mistake had not occurred. I believe that of all pursuits common to man, I was by nature most fitted for that of a solicitor. At the Bar, as a pleader, I should have failed, and ruined half the clients who entrusted me with briefs. But for penetration, for seizing, without effort, the different points of a case laid before me, few equalled me.

I mention this only because it is a fact: not from motives of self-praise and vanity. Vanity? I am only thankful that my talents were directed into their proper channel. And this judgment, exercised now, told me that Leah was not guilty. I said so to Arthur Lake.

The return of Watts interrupted us. He had brought back with him Mr. Brightman's butler, Perry: a respectable, trustworthy man, who had been long in the family. I shall never forget his emotion as he stood over his dead master, to whom he was much attached. Mrs. and Miss Brightman had gone to Hastings for two or three days, he said, and I determined to go there in the morning and break the sad tidings to them.

Sad tidings, indeed; a grievous calamity for all of us. That night I could not sleep, and in the morning I rose unrefreshed. The doubt about Leah and the money also troubled me. Though in one sense convinced that she could not have done it, the possibility that she might be guilty kept presenting itself before me.

She came into the room while I was at breakfast—earlier than I need have been, so far as the train was concerned—and I detained her for a moment.

Very spruce and neat she looked this morning.

"Leah," I began, "there is an unpleasant mystery attending this affair."

"As to what Mr. Brightman has died of, sir?"

"I do not allude to that. But there is some money missing."

"Money!" echoed Leah, in what looked like genuine surprise.

"Last night, after Mr. Brightman came in from dinner, he put a small canvas bag, containing thirty pounds in gold, in the deep drawer of his desk in my room, locked it and put the keys in his pocket. I had occasion to look for that gold immediately after he was found dead, and it was gone."

"Bag and all?" said Leah, after a pause.

"Bag and all."

"Not stolen, surely?"

"I don't see how else it can have disappeared. It could not go without hands; and the question is, did anyone get into the house and take it?"

She looked at me, and I at her: she was apparently thinking. "But how could anyone get in, sir?" she asked in tones of remonstrance.

"I do not see how, unless it was when you went out, Leah. You were out some time, you know. You ran out of the house and down the steps leading to the river, and you were in great agitation. What did it mean?"

Leah threw her hands up in distress. "Oh, Mr. Charles!" she gasped. "Please don't question me, sir. I cannot tell you anything about that."

"I must know it, Leah."

She shook her head. Her tears had begun to fall.

"Indeed you must explain it to me," I continued, speaking gently. "There is no help for it. Don't you see that this will have to be investigated, and ——"

"You never suspect me of taking the money, sir?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"No, I do not," I replied firmly. "It is one thing to be sure of honesty, and quite another thing to wish mysterious circumstances cleared up, where the necessity for doing so exists. What was your mystery last night, Leah?"

"Must I tell you, sir?"

"Indeed you must. I daresay to tell it will not hurt you, or to hear it hurt me."

"I would die rather than Watts should know of it," she exclaimed, in low, impassioned tones, glancing towards the door.

"Watts is in the kitchen, Leah, and cannot hear you. Speak out."

"I never committed but one grave fault in my life," she began, "and that was telling a deliberate lie. The consequences have clung to me ever since, and if things go on as they are going on now, they'll just drive me into the churchyard. When I lived with your people I was a young widow, as you may remember, sir; but perhaps you did not know that I had a little child. Your mamma knew it, but I don't think the servants did, for I was never one to talk of my own affairs. Just your age, Master Charles, was my little Nancy, and when her father died his sister took to her; old Miss Williams—for she was a deal older than him. She had a bit of a farm in Dorsetshire, and I'm afraid Nancy had to work hard at it. But it failed, after a time, and Miss Williams died; and Nancy, then about seventeen, had come, I heard, to London. I was at Dover then, not long returned from abroad, and was just married to James Watts: and I found—I found," Leah dropped her voice, "that Nancy had gone wrong. Someone had turned her brain with his vows and his promises, and she had come up to London with him."

"Why don't you sit down whilst you talk, Leah?"

"I had told Watts I had no children," she continued, disregarding my injunction. "And that was the lie, Mr. Charles. More than once he had said in my hearing that he would never marry a ready-made family. For very shame I could not tell him, when I found how things were with Nancy. After we came to London, I searched her out and went to her in secret, begging her to leave the man, but she would not."

A burst of emotion stopped Leah. She soon resumed.

"She would not leave him. In spite of all I could say or do, though I went down on my knees to her and sobbed and prayed my heart out, she remained with him. And she is with him still."

"All this time?"

"All this time, sir; seven years. He was once superior to her in position, but he has fallen from it now, is unsteady, and drinks half his time away. Sometimes he is in work; oftener without it; and the misery and privation she goes through, no tongue can tell. He beats her, abuses her ——"

"Why does she not leave him?"

"Ah, sir, why don't we do many things that we ought? Partly, because she's afraid he would keep the children. There are three of them. Many a time she would have died of hunger, but for me. I help her all I can: she's my own child. Sir, you asked me, only yesterday, why I went a figure; but, instead of buying clothes for myself, I scrape and save, to keep her poor body and soul together. I go without food to take it to her; many a day I put my dinner away, telling Watts I don't feel inclined for it then, and will eat it by and by. He thinks I do so. She does not beg of me; she has never entered this house; she has never told that tyrant of hers that I am her mother. 'Mother,' she has said to me, 'never fear. I would rather die than bring trouble on you.'"

"But about last night?" I interrupted.

"I was at work in the kitchen when a little gravel was thrown against the window. I guessed who it was, and went up to the door. If Watts had been at home, I should have taken no notice, but just have said, 'Drat those street boys again!' or something of that sort. There she was, leaning against the opposite railings, and she crossed over when she saw me. She said she was beside herself with misery and trouble, and I believe she was. He had been beating her, and she had not tasted food since the previous day; not a crumb. She kept looking towards the steps leading to the Thames, and I thought she might have got it in her head, what with her weak condition of body and her misery of mind, to put an end to herself. I tried, sir, to soothe and reason with her; what else could I do? I said I would fetch her some food, and give her sevenpence to buy a loaf to take home to her children."

"Where does she live?" I interposed.

"In this parish, St. Clement Danes; and there are some parts of this parish, you know, sir, as bad as any in London. When I offered to fetch her food, she said, No, she would not take it; her life was too wretched to bear, and she should end it; she had come out to do so. It was just what I feared. I scolded her. I told her to stay there at the door, and I shut it and ran down for the food. But when I got back to the door, I couldn't see her anywhere. Then I heard a voice from the steps call out 'Good-bye!' and I knew she was going to the water. At that moment Mr. Lennard came up, and I asked him to remain in the house while I went out for a minute. I was almost frightened out of my senses."

"Did you find her?"

"I found her, sir, looking down at the river. I reasoned her

into a little better mood, and she ate a little of the food, and I brought her back up the steps, gave her the sevenpence, and led her up the street and across the Strand, on her way home. And that's the whole truth, Mr. Charles, of what took me out last night; and I declare I know no more of the missing money than a babe unborn. I had just come back with the empty plate and cloth when you saw me sitting on the stairs."

The whole truth I felt sure it was. Every word, every look of Leah's proclaimed it.

"And that's my sad secret," she added; "one I have to bear about with me at all times, in my work and out of my work. Watts is a good husband to me, but he prides himself on his respectability, and I wouldn't have him know that I have deceived him for the universe. I wouldn't have him know that *she*, being what she is, was my daughter. He said he'd treat me to Ashley's Circus last winter, and gave me two shillings, and I pretended to go. But I gave it to her, poor thing, and walked about in the cold, looking at the late shops, till it was time to come home. Watts asked me what I had seen, and I told him such marvels that he said he'd go the next night himself, for he had never heard the like, and he supposed it must be a benefit night. You will not tell him my secret, sir?"

"No, Leah, I will not tell him. It is safe with me."

With a long-drawn sigh she turned to leave the room. But I stopped her.

"A moment yet, Leah. Can you remember at what time you took up the water to Mr. Brightman?"

"It was some time before the stone came to the window. About ten minutes, maybe, sir, after you went out. I heard you come downstairs whistling, and go out."

"No one came to the house during my absence?"

"No one at all, sir."

"Did you notice whether Mr. Brightman had either of the drawers of his desk open when you took up the water?"

Leah shook her head. "I can't say, sir," she answered. "I did not notice, one way or the other."

CHAPTER XVII.

LADY CLAVERING.

The people were coming out of the various churches when I reached Hastings. Going straight to the Queen's Hotel, I asked for Mrs. Brightman. Perry had said she was staying there. It was, I believe, the only good hotel in the place in those days. Hatch, Mrs. Brightman's maid, came to me at once. Her mistress was not yet up, she said, having a bad headache.

Hatch and I had become quite confidential friends during these

past years. She was not a whit altered since I first saw her, and to me did not look a day older. The flaming ringlets adorned her face as usual, and sky-blue cap-strings flowed behind them this morning. Hatch was glaringly plain; Hatch had a wonderful tongue, and was ever ready to exercise it, and Hatch's diction and grammar were unique; nevertheless, you could not help liking Hatch.

But to hear that Mrs. Brightman was ill in bed rather checkmated me. I really did not know what to do.

"My business with your mistress is of very great importance, Hatch," I observed. "I ought to see her. I have come down on purpose to see her."

"You might see her this afternoon, Mr. Charles; not before," spoke Hatch decisively. "These headaches is uncommon bad while they last. Perhaps Miss Annabel would do? She is not here, though; but is staying with her Aunt Lucy."

"I have brought down bad news, Hatch. I should not like Miss Annabel to be the first to hear it."

"Bad news!" repeated Hatch quickly, as she stared at me with her great green eyes. "Our house ain't burnt down, surely! Is that the news, sir?"

"Worse than that, Hatch. It concerns Mr. Brightman."

Hatch's manner changed in a moment. Her voice became timid. "For goodness' sake, Mr. Charles! he is not ill, is he?"

"Worse, Hatch. He is dead," I whispered.

Hatch backed to a chair and dropped into it: we were in Mrs. Brightman's sitting-room. "The Lord be good to us!" she exclaimed, in all reverence. Her red cheeks turned white, her eloquence, for once, deserted her.

I sat down and gave her the details in a few brief words: she was a confidential, trusted servant, and had lived with her mistress many years. It affected her even more than I had expected. She wrung her hands, her tears coursed freely.

"My poor master—my poor mistress!" she exclaimed. "What on earth—Mr. Charles, is it *sure* he is dead? quite dead?" she broke off to ask.

"Nay, Hatch, I have told you."

Presently she got up, and seemed to rally her courage. "Anyway, Mr. Charles, we shall have to meet this, and deal with it as we best may. I mean the family, sir, what's left of 'em. And missis must be told—and, pardon me, sir, but I think I'd best be the one to tell her. She is so used to me, you see," added Hatch, looking at me keenly. "She might take it better from me than from you; that is, it might seem less hard."

"Indeed, I should be only too glad to be spared the task," was my answer.

"But you must tell Miss Brightman, sir, and Miss Annabel. Perhaps if you were to go now, Mr. Charles, while I do the best

I can with my missis, we might be ready for the afternoon train. That, you say, will be best to travel by ——"

"I said the train would be the best of the trains to-day, Hatch. It is for Mrs. Brightman to consider whether she will go up to-day or to-morrow."

"Well, yes, Mr. Charles, that's what I mean. My head's almost moithered. But I think she is sure to go up to-day."

Miss Brightman, who was Mr. Brightman's only sister, lived in a handsome house facing the sea. Annabel visited her a good deal, staying with her sometimes for weeks together. Mr. Brightman had sanctioned it, Mrs. Brightman did not object to it.

Upon reaching the house, the footman said Miss Brightman was not yet in from church, and ushered me into the drawing-room. Annabel was there. And really, like Hatch, she was not much altered, except in height and years, since the day I first saw her, when she had chattered to me so freely and lent me her favourite book, "The Old English Baron." She was fourteen then: a graceful, pretty child, with charming manners; her dark brown eyes, sweet and tender and bright like her father's, her features delicately carved like her mother's, a rose-blush on her dimpled cheeks. She was twenty now, and a graceful, pretty woman. No, not one whit altered.

She was standing by the fire in her silk attire, just as she had come in from church, only her bonnet-strings untied. Bonnets were really bonnets then, and rendered a lovely face all the more attractive. Annabel's bonnet that day was pink, and its border intermingled, as it seemed, with the waves of her soft brown hair. She quite started with surprise.

"Is it *you*, Charley!" she exclaimed, coming forward, the sweet rose-blush deepening and the sweet eyes brightening. "Have you come to Hastings? Is papa with you?"

"No, Annabel, he is not with me," I answered gravely, as I clasped her hand. "I wanted to see Miss Brightman."

"She will be here directly. She called in to see old Mrs. Day, who is ill: a great friend of Aunt Lucy's. Did papa ——"

But we were interrupted by the return of Miss Brightman, a small, fragile woman, with delicate lungs. Annabel left us together.

How I accomplished my unhappy task I hardly knew. How Miss Brightman subsequently imparted it to Annabel I did not know at all. It must be enough to say that we went to London by an afternoon train, bearing our weight of care. All, except Miss Brightman. Hatch travelled in the carriage with us.

In appearance, at any rate, the news had most affected Mrs. Brightman. Her frame trembled, her pale face and restless hands twitched with nervousness. Of course, her headache went for something.

"I have them so very badly," she moaned to me once during the journey. "They unfit me for everything."

And, indeed, these headaches of Mrs. Brightman's were nothing new to me. She had always suffered from them. But of late, that is to say during the past few months, when by chance I went to Clapham, I more often than not found her ill and invisible from this distressing pain. My intimacy with Mrs. Brightman had not made much progress. The same proud, haughty woman she was when I first saw her, she had remained. Coldly civil to me, as to others; and that was all that could be said.

When about half way up, whilst waiting for an express to pass, or something of that sort, and we were for some minutes at a standstill, I told Mrs. Brightman about the missing money belonging to George Coney.

"It is of little consequence if it be lost," was her indifferent and no doubt thoughtless comment. "What is thirty pounds?"

Little, I knew, to a firm like ours, but the uncertainty it left us in was a great deal. "Setting aside the mystery attaching to the loss," I remarked, "there remains a suspicion that we may have a thief about us; and that is not a pleasant feeling. Other things may go next."

Upon reaching London we drove to Essex Street. What a painful visit it was! Even now I cannot bear to think of it. Poor Mrs. Brightman grew nervously excited. As she looked down upon him, in his death-stillness, I thought she would have wept her heart away. Annabel strove to be calm for her mother's sake.

After some tea, which Leah and Hatch brought up to us, I saw them safely to Clapham, and then returned home.

Monday morning rose, and its work with it: the immediate work connected with our painful loss, and the future work that was to fall upon me. The chief weight and responsibility of the business had hitherto been his share; now it must be all mine. In the course of the day I sent a cheque to George Coney.

An inquest had to be held, and took place early on Tuesday morning. Mr. Brightman's death was proved, beyond doubt, to have occurred from natural causes, though not from disease of the heart. He had died by the visitation of God. But for the disappearance of the money, my thoughts would never have dwelt on any other issue.

After it was over, Lennard was standing with me in the front room, from which the jury had just gone out, when we fell to talking about the missing money and its unaccountable loss. It lay heavily upon my mind. Fathom it I could not, turn it about as I would. Edgar Lennard was above suspicion, and he was the only one, so far as he and I knew, who had been in the room after the bag was put there, Leah excepted. Of her I felt equally certain. Lennard began saying how heartily he wished he had not been told to come back that night; but I requested him to be at ease, for he had quite as much reason to suspect me, as I him.

"Not quite," answered he, smiling; "considering that you had to make it good."

"Well, Lennard, I daresay the mystery will be solved some time or other. Robberies, like murders, generally come out. The worst is, we cannot feel assured that other losses may not follow."

"Not they," returned Lennard, too confidently. "This one has been enough for us."

"Did it ever strike you, Lennard, that Mr. Brightman had been in failing health lately?"

"Often," emphatically spoke Lennard. "I think he had something on his mind."

"On his mind? I should say it was on his health. There were times when he seemed to have neither energy nor spirits for anything. You don't know how much business he has, of late, left to me that he used to do himself."

"Well," contended Lennard, "it used to strike me he was not at ease; that something or other was troubling him."

"Yes, and now that this fatal termination has ensued, we see that the trouble may have been health," I maintained. "Possibly he knew that something was dangerously wrong with him."

"Possibly so," conceded Lennard.

He was leaving the room for his own, when a clerk met him and said that Sir Edmund Clavering was asking for Mr. Strange. I bade him show up Sir Edmund.

Mr. Brightman had for years been confidential solicitor to Sir Ralph Clavering, a physician, whose baronetcy was a new one. When Sir Ralph gave up practice, and retired to an estate he bought in the country, a Mrs. Clavering, a widow, whose husband had been a distant cousin of Sir Ralph's, entered it with him, as his companion and housekeeper. It ended in his marrying her, as these companionships so often end, especially where the man is old, and the woman young, attractive and wily. Mrs. Clavering was poor, and no doubt she played for the stake she won. The heir presumptive to Sir Ralph's title was his nephew, Edmund Clavering, but his fortune he could leave to whom he would.

Sir Ralph Clavering died—only about ten days before Mr. Brightman's own death. The funeral took place on the Tuesday—this very day week of which I am writing. After attending it, Mr. Brightman returned to the office in the evening. The clerks had left and he came up to my room.

"Take this off my hat, will you, Charles," he said. "I can't go home in it, of course: and Mrs. Brightman has a superstition against hat-scarves going into the house."

I undid the black silk and laid it on the table. "What am I to do with it, sir?"

"Anything. Give it to Leah for a Sunday apron. My lady treated us to a specimen of her temper when the will was read," he added.

"She expected to inherit all, and is not satisfied with the competency left to her."

"Who does inherit?" I asked: for Mr. Brightman had never enlightened me, although I knew that he had made Sir Ralph's will.

"Edmund Clavering. And quite right that he should do so: the estate ought to go with the title. Besides, setting aside that consideration, Sir Edmund is entitled to it quite as much as my lady. More so, I think. There's the will, Charles; you can read it."

I glanced over the will, which Mr. Brightman had brought back with him. Lady Clavering had certainly a competency, but the bulk of the property was left to Sir Edmund, the inheritor of the title. I was very much surprised.

"I thought she would have had it all, Mr. Brightman. Living estranged as Sir Ralph did from his brother, even refusing to be reconciled when the latter was dying, the estrangement extended to the son, Edmund. I certainly thought Lady Clavering would have come in for all. You thought so too, sir."

"I did, until I made the will. And at one time it was Sir Ralph's intention to leave most of it to her. But for certain reasons which arose, he altered his plans. Sufficient reasons," added Mr. Brightman, in a marked, emphatic manner. "He imparted them to me when he gave instructions for his will. *I* should have left her less."

"May I know them?"

"No, Charles. They are told to me in confidence, and they concern neither you nor me. Is the gas out in the next room?"

"Yes. Shall I light it?"

"It is not worth while. That hand-lamp of yours will do. I only want to put up the will."

I took the lamp, and lighted Mr. Brightman into the front room, his own exclusively. He opened the iron safe, and there deposited Sir Ralph Clavering's will for safety; to be left there until it should be proved.

That is sufficient explanation for the present. Sir Edmund Clavering, shown up by Lennard himself, came into the room. I had never acted for him; Mr. Brightman had invariably done so.

"Can you carry my business through, Mr. Strange?" he asked, after expressing his shock and regret at Mr. Brightman's sudden fate.

"I hope so. Why not, Sir Edmund?"

"You have not Mr. Brightman's legal knowledge and experience."

"Not his experience, certainly; because he was an old man and I am a young one. But, as far as practice goes, I have for some time had chief control of the business. Mr. Brightman almost confined himself to seeing clients. You may trust me, Sir Edmund."

"Oh, yes, I daresay it will be all right," he rejoined. "Do you know that Lady Clavering and her cousin John—my cousin also—mean to dispute the will?"

"Upon what grounds?"

"Upon Sir Ralph's incompetency to make one, I suppose—as foul a plea as ever false woman or man invented. Mr. Brightman can prove——Good heavens! every moment I forget that he is dead," broke off Sir Edmund. "How unfortunate that he should have gone just now."

"But there cannot fail to be ample proof of Sir Ralph's competency. The servants about him must know that he was of sane and healthy mind."

"I don't know what her schemes may be," rejoined Sir Edmund, "but I do know that she will not leave a stone unturned to wrest my rights from me. I am more bitter than gall and wormwood to her."

"Because you have inherited most of the money."

"Ay, for one thing. But there's another reason, more galling to her even than that."

Sir Edmund looked at me with a peculiar expression. He was about my own age, and would have been an exceedingly pleasant man, but for his pride. When he could so far forget that as to throw it off, he was warm and cordial.

"Her ladyship is a scheming woman, Mr. Strange. She flung off into a fit of resentment at first, which Mr. Brightman witnessed, but very shortly her tactics changed. Before Sir Ralph had been three days in his grave, she contrived to intimate to me that we had better join interests. Do you understand?"

I did not know whether to understand or not. It was inconceivable.

"And I feel ashamed to enlighten you," said Sir Edmund passionately. "She offered herself to me; my willing wife. 'If you will wed no other woman, I will wed no other man ——' How runs the old ballad? Not in so many words, but in terms sufficiently plain to be deciphered. I answered as plainly, and declined. Declined to join interests: declined *her:* and so made her my mortal enemy for ever. Do you know her?"

"I never saw her."

"Take care of yourself, then, should you be brought into contact with her," laughed Sir Edmund. "She is a Jezebel. All the same, she is one of the most fascinating of women: irresistibly so no doubt to many people. Had she been any but my uncle's wife—widow—I don't know how it might have gone with me. By the way, Mr. Strange, did Mr. Brightman impart to you Sir Ralph's reason for devising his property to me? He had always said, you know, that he would not do it. Mr. Brightman would not tell me the reason for the change."

"No, he did not. Sir Ralph intended, I believe, to bequeath most of it to his wife, and he altered his mind quite suddenly. So much Mr. Brightman told me."

"Found out Jezebel, perhaps, at some trick or other."

That I thought all too likely: but did not say so. Sir Edmund continued to speak a little longer upon business matters, and then rose.

"The will had better be proved without delay," he paused to say.

"I will see about it the first thing next week, Sir Edmund. It would have been done this week but for Mr. Brightman's unexpected death."

"Why do you sink your voice to a whisper?" asked Sir Edmund, as we were quitting the room. "Do you fear eavesdroppers?"

I was not conscious that I had sunk it, until recalled to the fact. "Every time I approach this door," I said, pointing to the one opening into the other room, "I feel as if I were in the presence of the dead. He is still lying there."

"What—Mr. Brightman?"

"It is where he died. He will be removed to his late residence to-night."

"I think I will see him," cried Sir Edmund, laying his hand on the door.

"As you please. I would not advise you." And he apparently thought better of it, and went down.

I had to attend the Vice-Chancellor's Court; law business goes on without respect to the dead. Upon my return in the afternoon, I was in the front office, speaking to Lennard, when a carriage drove down the street, and stopped at the door. Our blinds were down, but one of the clerks peeped out. "A gentleman's chariot, painted black," he announced: "the servants in deep mourning."

Allen went out and brought back a card. "The lady wishes to see you, sir."

I cast my eyes on it. "Lady Clavering." And an involuntary smile crossed my face, at the remembrance of Sir Edmund's caution, should I ever be brought into contact with her. But what could Lady Clavering want with me?

She was conducted upstairs, and I followed, leaving my business with Lennard until afterwards. She was already seated in the very chair that, not two hours ago, had held her opponent, Sir Edmund: a very handsome woman, dressed as coquettishly as her widow's weeds allowed. Her face was beautiful as to form and colouring, but its free and vain expression spoiled it. Every glance of her coal-black eye, every movement of her head and hands, every word that fell from her lips, was a purposed display of her charms, a demand for admiration. Sir Edmund need not have cautioned me to keep heart-whole. One so vain and foolish would repel rather than attract me, even though gifted with beauty rarely accorded to woman. A Jezebel? Yes, I agreed with him: a very Jezebel.

"I have the honour of speaking to Mr. Strange? Charles Strange, as I have heard Mr. Brightman call you," she said, with a smile of fascination.

"Yes, I am Charles Strange. What can I do for you, madam?"

"Will you promise to do what I have come to ask you?"

The more she spoke, the less I liked her. I am naturally frank in manner, but I grew reserved with her. "I cannot make a promise, without knowing its nature, Lady Clavering."

She picked up her long jet chain, and twirled it about in her fingers. "What a frightfully sudden death Mr. Brightman's has been," she resumed. "Did he lie ill at all?"

"No. He died suddenly, as he was sitting at his desk. And to render it still more painful, no one was with him."

"I read the account in this morning's paper, and came up at once to see you," resumed Lady Clavering. "He was my husband's confidential adviser. Were you in his confidence also?"

I presumed that she meant Mr. Brightman's, and answered accordingly. "Partially so."

"You are aware how very unjustly my poor childish husband strove to will away his property. Of course the will cannot be allowed to stand. At the time of Sir Ralph's funeral, I informed Mr. Brightman that I should take some steps to assert my rights, and I wished him to be my solicitor in the matter. But no: he refused; and went over to the enemy, Edmund Clavering."

"We were solicitors to Mr. Edmund Clavering before he came into the title."

"Mr. Brightman was; you never did anything for him," she hastily interrupted; "therefore no obligation can lie on you to act for him now. I want you to act for me, and I have come all this way to request you to do so."

"I cannot do so, Lady Clavering. I have seen Sir Edmund since Mr. Brightman's death, and have undertaken to carry on his business."

"Seen Sir Edmund since Mr. Brightman's death!"

"I have indeed."

She threw herself back in her chair, and looked at me from under her vain eyelids. "Leave him, Mr. Strange; you can easily make an excuse, if you will. Mr. Brightman held all my husband's papers, knew all about his property, and no one is so fitted to act for me as you, his partner. I will make it worth your while."

"What you suggest is impossible, Lady Clavering. We are enlisted in the interests—I speak professionally—of the other side, and have already advised with Sir Edmund as to the steps to be taken in the suit you purpose to enter against him. To leave him for you, after doing so, would be dishonourable and impossible."

She shot another glance at me from those mischievous eyes. "I will make it well worth your while, I repeat, Mr. Strange."

I could look mischievous too, if I pleased; perhaps did on occasion; but she could read nothing in my gaze then, as it met hers, that was not sober as old Time.

"I can only repeat my answer, Lady Clavering."

Not a word spoke she; only made play with her eyes. Did the woman mean to subdue me? Her gaze dropped.

"I have heard Mr. Brightman speak of Charles Strange not only as a thorough lawyer, but as a *gentleman;* very fond of the world's vanities."

"Not very fond, Lady Clavering. Joining in them occasionally, in proper time and place."

"I met you once at a large evening party. It was at old Judge Tartar's," she ran on.

"Indeed!" I answered, not remembering it.

"It was before I married Sir Ralph. You came in with your relative, Sergeant Stillingfar. What a charming man he is! I heard you tell someone you had just come down from Oxford. *Won't* you act for me, Mr. Strange?"

"Indeed, it does not lie in my power."

"Well, I did not think a gentleman"—with another stress upon the word—"would have refused to act on my behalf."

"Lady Clavering must perceive that I have no alternative."

"Who is Edmund Clavering that he should be preferred to me?" she demanded with some vehemence.

"Nay, Lady Clavering, circumstances compel the preference."

A silence ensued, and I glanced at my watch—the lawyer's hint. She did not take it.

"Can you tell me whether, amidst the papers Mr. Brightman held belonging to Sir Ralph, there are any letters of mine?"

"I cannot say."

"Some of my letters, to Sir Ralph and others, are missing, and I think they must have got amongst the papers by mistake. Will you look?"

"I will take an early opportunity of doing so."

"Oh, but I mean now. I want them. Why cannot you search now?"

I did not tell her why. In the first place, most of the Clavering papers were in the room where Mr. Brightman was lying—and there were other reasons also.

"I cannot spare the time, Lady Clavering: I have an appointment out of doors which I must keep. I will search for you in a day or two. But, should any letters of yours be here—of which I assure you I am ignorant—you will pardon my intimating that it may not be expedient to give them up."

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"Should they bear at all upon the cause at issue between you and Sir Edmund Clavering ——"

"But they don't," she interrupted.

"Then, if they do not, I shall be happy to enclose them to you."

"It is of the utmost consequence to me that I should regain possession of them," she said, with suppressed agitation.

"And, if possible, you shall do so." I rose as I spoke, and waited for her to rise. She did so, but advanced to the window and pulled the blind aside.

"My carriage is not back yet, Mr. Strange. A friend who came up with me has gone to do a commission for herself. It will be here in a few minutes. I suppose I can wait."

I begged her to remain as long as she pleased, but to excuse me for I was already behind time. She drew up the blind a little and sat down at the window as I left her.

After giving some directions to Lennard, I hastened to keep my appointment, which was at the Temple with a chamber-counsel.

The interview lasted about twenty minutes. As I turned into Essex Street again, Lady Clavering's carriage was bowling up it. I raised my hat, and she bowed to me, leaning before another lady, who sat with her, but she looked white and frightened. What had gone with her brilliant colour? At the door, when I reached it, stood the clerks, Lennard amongst them, some with a laugh on their countenances, some looking as white and scared as Lady Clavering.

"Why, what is this?" I exclaimed.

They went back to their desks, and Lennard explained.

"You must have seen Lady Clavering's carriage," he began.

"Yes."

"Just before it came for her, cries and shrieks were heard above; startling shrieks, terrifying us all. We hastened up with one accord, and found that Lady Clavering ——"

"Well?" I impatiently cried, looking at Lennard.

"Had gone into the next room, and seen Mr. Brightman," he whispered. "It took three of us to hold her, and it ended with hysterics. Leah came flying from the kitchen, took off her bonnet, and brought some water."

I was sorry to hear it; sorry that any woman should have been exposed to so unpleasant a fright. "But it was her own fault," I said to Lennard. "How could she think of entering a room of which the door was locked?"

"What right had she to attempt to enter it at all, locked or unlocked, I should say, Mr. Strange," returned Lennard severely. "And the best of it was, she laid the blame upon us; asking what business we had to put dead people into public rooms."

"She is a curious sort of woman, I fancy, Lennard."

And the more I thought of her the more curious I found her. The door between the two rooms had been locked, and the key was lying in the corner of the mantelpiece. Lady Clavering must have searched for the key before she could open the door and enter the room.

With what motive had she entered it?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MISSING WILL.

MR. BRIGHTMAN was buried on the Thursday, and Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar came up from circuit for the funeral. Three or four other gentlemen attended, and myself. It was all done very quietly. After that the will was read.

He had not left as much money as might have been expected. I suppose the rate at which they lived had absorbed it. Nearly the whole of it was vested in trustees, who would pay the interest to Mrs. Brightman until her death, when it would all descend unconditionally to Annabel. If she married again, one half the yearly income at once went to Annabel. To my surprise, I was left executor. Mr. Brightman had never told me so. Of the two executors originally appointed—for the will had been made many years—one had recently died, and Mr. Brightman had inserted my name in his place. That all the work would fall upon my shoulders I knew, for the other executor had become a confirmed invalid.

With regard to our own articles of partnership, provided for by a recent codicil, they were very favourable to me, though somewhat peculiar. If Mr. Brightman died before I was thirty years of age, two-thirds of the net profits of the business were to be paid to Mrs. Brightman for three years; but if I had passed my thirtieth year when he died, only half the profits would go to her. After the first three years, one-third of the profits would be hers for three years more; and then it would all revert to me absolutely.

I wanted some years yet of thirty. But it was a most excellent and lucrative practice. Few men fall into so good a thing when they are still young.

"So there you are, Charles, the head of one of the best professional houses in London," remarked my Uncle Stillingfar, as he took my arm when we were leaving the house. "Rather different from what your fate might have been, had you carried out your wish of going to the Bar. My boy, you may be thankful that you know nothing of the struggles I had to go through."

"Do you still feel quite well and strong, uncle?" I asked, after a bit.

"Yes, I do, Charles. I suppose you think I am growing old. But I believe I am more capable of work than are many of my juniors who are now on circuit with me. With a sound constitution, never played with, and a temperate way of life, we retain our energies, by God's blessing, to an older age than mine."

That was no doubt true. True also that he must be making heaps of money. I wondered what he meant to do with it. He had been very liberal to me as long as I needed help, but that time was over.

The sad week passed away. On the following Monday I set to

professional business in earnest: the previous week had been much given to matters not professional. One of the first things to be attended to was to prove the will of Sir Ralph Clavering, and, in the course of the morning, I unlocked the iron safe in the front room to get it. Nothing was ever placed in that safe but wills and title-deeds, and these were never placed anywhere else. But where this particular will was hiding itself, I could not tell, for I turned over every paper the place contained without coming to it. "More haste less speed," cried I to myself, for I had been doing it in a hurry. "I must have overlooked it."

So I began again and went through the papers carefully, paper by paper. I had not overlooked it, for Sir Ralph's will was certainly not there.

Now, was I awake or dreaming? Was there a fairy in the walls to remove things, or was the house bewitched?—or what was it? I went and examined the Clavering papers, which were in Mr. Brightman's desk in the adjoining room—my room, which had been cleaned and put straight again. But the will was not amongst them. I searched other drawers and desks in vain. Then I called up Lennard.

"Do you know anything of Sir Ralph Clavering's will? I cannot find it."

"It must be in the safe," he replied.

"It is not in the safe. Lennard, this is very strange: first that bag of money, and now the will."

"Oh, but it cannot be," returned Lennard, after a pause. "That the gold went, appears to be too plain, but who would take a will? Money might be a temptation, if any stranger did enter Mr. Brightman's room that night, but ——"

"It has been proved, almost beyond doubt, that no one entered, and yet the money went. Lennard, there's something not canny at work in the house, as the Scotch say."

"Do not think it, Mr. Strange," he replied warmly. "The gold appears to have gone in some mysterious manner, but the will cannot be gone. Depend upon it, it is in the safe."

I had a great respect for Lennard's judgment, but I had as great confidence in my own eyesight. I unlocked the safe again, and, taking out the parchments, one by one, handed them to Lennard, that he might read their titles. "There," said I, when we had reached the last; "is the will amongst them?"

Lennard's face had turned grave. "This is very extraordinary," he exclaimed. "Mr. Brightman would not put it anywhere else."

"He never put a will up in any other place but this since I have been with him, Lennard; and I myself saw him put it in; held the light for him: it was in the evening of last Tuesday week, after he came back from Sir Ralph's funeral. It has gone after the gold."

"No, no," he cried, almost in agitation; "it has not, it has not: I will never believe it.'

One very slight hope came to me. Mr. Brightman might have given it into the custody of Sir Edmund Clavering. But then, Sir Edmund would surely have said so, when he spoke to me about proving the will. The loss of the money was nothing to this, for that had been easily replaced, and there was an end of the matter; but this loss could not be replaced, and there was no knowing what the end would be. It might be little short of ruin to Sir Edmund Clavering, and nothing short of ruin to me: for who would continue to employ a firm liable to lose wills?

I was greatly occupied that day, but the missing will lay upon me like a nightmare, and I forced time for a dash up to Sir Edmund Clavering's hotel in the afternoon, bribing the cabman to double speed. By good luck, I found Sir Edmund in, and inquired if he held possession of the will.

"Mr. Brightman holds the will," he replied. "Held, I should say: I cannot yet speak of him in the past tense, you see. He took it home with him after Sir Ralph's funeral."

"I know he brought it home, Sir Edmund; but I thought it possible he might since then have given it into your possession. I hoped he had, for I cannot find the will. I have searched for it everywhere."

"Not find the will!" he echoed. "Perhaps you have looked in every place but the right one," he added, with a slight laugh. "I can tell you where it is."

"Where?"

"In the iron safe in Mr. Brightman's room."

"It was placed there: we never put wills anywhere else; never: but it is not there now. May I ask how you knew it was there, Sir Edmund?"

"Because on the day but one following the funeral I came to town and had an interview with Mr. Brightman in his room. It was on the Thursday. Perhaps you remember that I was with him that day?"

"Quite well."

"During our consultation we differed in opinion as to a certain clause in the will, and Mr. Brightman took it out of the safe to convince me. He was right, and I was wrong: as, indeed, I might have known, considering that he had made the will. He put it back into the safe at once and locked it up. When are you going to prove the will? It ought to be done now."

"I was going to set about it this very day; but, as I say, I cannot find the will."

"It must be easy enough to find a big parchment like that. If not in the safe, Mr. Brightman must have put it elsewhere. Look in all his pigeon-holes and places."

"I have looked: I have looked everywhere." Just as I looked some days before for the bag of sovereigns, I mentally added.

But Sir Edmund Clavering was determined to treat the matter lightly: he evidently attached no importance to it whatever, believing that Mr. Brightman had only changed its place.

I went home again, feeling as uncomfortable as I had ever felt in my life. An undefined idea, a doubt, had flashed into my mind whilst I had been talking to Lennard. Imagination is quicker with me, I know, than with many people; and the moment a thing puzzles me, I must dive into its why and wherefore: its various bearings and phases, probable and improbable, natural and unnatural. This doubt: which I had driven away at the time; had been driving away during my gallop to Sir Edmund's, and whilst I was conversing with him: now grew into suspicion.

Let me explain how I arrived at this suspicion. When I found the will had disappeared from the safe; when I searched and searched in vain, I could only come to the conclusion that it had been stolen. But why was it taken? From what motive? Why should that one particular parchment be abstracted, and the others left? Obviously, it could only have been from interested motives. Now, who had an interest in getting possession of the will—so that it might not be proved and acted upon? Only one person in the whole world—Lady Clavering. And Lady Clavering had been alone in the room where the safe was for nearly half an hour!

If she had obtained possession of the will, there was farewell to our ever getting it again. I saw through her character at that first interview: she was a woman absolutely without scruple.

But, how could she have got at it? Even supposing she knew the will was in the iron safe, she could not have opened it without the key; and how could she have obtained the key? Again—if Lady Clavering were the guilty party, what became of my very natural suspicions that the will and the gold were both taken by the same hand? And with the gold Lady Clavering could have had nothing to do. Look at it as I would, perplexities arose; points difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile.

Lennard met me in the passage on my return. "Is it all right? Has Sir Edmund got it, sir?"

"No, no; I told you it was a forlorn hope. Come upstairs, Lennard. Sir Edmund has not the will," I continued, as we entered the front room. "He says that when he was here last Thursday week, Mr. Brightman had occasion to refer to the will, took it from the safe and put it back again. Therefore it is since that period that the theft has taken place."

"Can you really look upon it as *stolen?*" Lennard uttered, with emphasis. "Who would steal so valueless a thing as a will?"

"Not valueless to everyone."

"No one in the house would do such a thing. You have a suspicion?" he added.

"Yes, I have, Lennard."

He began to pace the room. Lennard was, in truth, completely upset by this loss. "Of whom?" he presently jerked out. "Surely not of Leah!"

"Of Leah! Oh, no."

"I fancied you suspected her in the matter of the money. I feel sure she was innocent."

"So do I. Leah no more took the money than you or I did, Lennard. And what should she want with the will? If I made her a present of all the wills in the safe, she would only light her fires with them, as useless lumber. Try again."

But he only shook his head. "I cannot catch your drift, sir."

"To all persons, two excepted, the will would be as useless as to Leah. One of those two is Sir Edmund; and he has it not: the other is Lady Clavering."

"But surely you cannot suspect her!" exclaimed Lennard. "You cannot suspect Lady Clavering!"

"To say that I suspect her would perhaps be too strong a word, Lennard. If my doubts rest upon her at all, it is because she is the only person who could have an interest in getting possession of the will: and she is the only stranger, as far as I can recollect, who has been alone in this room sufficiently long to take it from the safe."

Lennard was incredulous. "But she had not the key of the safe. She could not have opened it without it."

"I know—I see the improbabilities that encompass my doubts: but I can think of nothing else."

"Where was the key of the safe?" asked Lennard.

"In that back room; and in Mr. Brightman's deep drawer; the drawer from which the gold was taken," was my grave answer. "And she could not have got at it without—without passing him."

Lennard's face grew hot.

"And the key of that drawer was here, in my own pocket, on the bunch." I took out the bunch of keys as I spoke—Mr. Brightman's bunch until within a few days—and shook it before him.

"What mystery has come over the house, about keys, and locks, and things disappearing?" Lennard murmured, as a man bewildered.

"Lennard, it is the question I am asking myself."

"She could never have gone in there and passed him; and stood there while she got the key. A young and beautiful woman like Lady Clavering! Sir, it would be unnatural."

"No more unnatural for beauty than for ugliness, Lennard. Unnatural for most women, though, whether pretty or plain."

"But how could she have divined that the key of the safe was in that drawer, or in that room?" urged Lennard. "For the matter of that, how could she have known that the will was in the safe?"

Truly the affair presented grave perplexities. "One curious part of it is that she should have called you up with her screams, Len-

nard," I remarked. "If she had only that moment opened the door, and seen—what frightened her, she could not have been already in the room, hunting for the key. Were the screams assumed? Was it all a piece of acting?"

"It would take a subtle actress to counterfeit her terror," replied Lennard; "and the best actress breathing could not have assumed her ghastly look. No, Mr. Strange, I believe what she said was the fact: that, weary of waiting for her carriage, she had walked about the room, then opened the door, and passed into the other without a thought, except that of distracting her ennui."

"She must have looked about for the key of the door, mind you, Lennard."

A man has rarely been placed in a more disagreeable predicament than I felt to be in then. It was of no use temporising with the matter: I could only meet it boldly, and I sent that evening for Sir Edmund Clavering, and laid it before him. I told him of Lady Clavering's visit, and hinted at the doubt which had forced itself on my mind. Sir Edmund jumped to the conclusion (and into a passion at the same time) that she was the culprit, and declared he would apply for a warrant at Bow Street on the morrow, to take her into custody. With extreme difficulty I got him to hear reason against anything of the sort.

Lennard, who had remained, came round to Sir Edmund's opinion that it must inevitably have been Lady Clavering. Failing her, no shadow of suspicion could attach itself to anyone else, sift and search into the matter as we would.

"But neither was there as to the gold," was my rejoinder.

Then after they were gone, and I sat by the fire in the front room, and went over the details dispassionately and carefully, and lay awake the best part of the night, going over them still, my suspicions of Lady Clavering lessened, and I arrived at the conclusion that they were too improbable to be well founded.

Nevertheless, I intended to pursue the course I had decided on: and that was to call upon her. She, like Sir Edmund, was now staying in London, at an hotel. Not to accuse her, but to see if I could not, indirectly, make out something that would confirm or dissipate my suspicion.

I went up in the course of the morning. Lady Clavering was sitting alone, her widow's cap on the sofa beside her. She hurried it on to her head, when the waiter announced me.

"It is so hot and ugly," she exclaimed, in tones of excuse; "I sit without it when I am alone. So you have condescended to return my visit, Mr. Strange. I thought you gentlemen of the law took refuge in your plea of occupation to ignore etiquette."

"Indeed it is not out of deference to etiquette that I have called upon you to-day, Lady Clavering, but ——"

"You have thought better of your refusal: you have come to say

you will undertake my business!" she interrupted, eyes and looks full of eagerness.

"Nor yet that," I was forced to reply, though, in truth, I should have been glad to conciliate her. "I am sure you will find many an advocate quite as efficient as I should be. The day you were at our house, did you happen to see ——"

"Mr. Strange, I must beg you, as a gentleman, not to allude to what I saw," she interposed, in tones of alarm. "I think it was inexcusable, on your part, not to have informed me what was in the next room."

"Pardon me, Lady Clavering; it would have been an unnecessary and unpleasant piece of information to volunteer: for how could I possibly foresee that you would be likely to enter that room?" I might have added—look for the key, unlock it, and go into it.

"I never saw a dead person in my life," she rejoined; "not even my husband; and I shall not easily recover from the shock. I would give anything rather than have been exposed to it."

"And so would I, and I shall always regret it," was my warm apology.

"Then why do you introduce the subject?"

"I did not intend to allude to that; but to your having sat in the front room I must allude; and I know you will excuse my asking you the question I am about to put to you. Did you happen to see a parchment lying in that front room: on the table, or the side-tables, or—anywhere, in short? We have missed one: and if you chanced to have noticed it, it would be a great assistance to us, as a proof that we need not carry our researches further back than that day."

"I don't remember that I saw any parchment," she carelessly rejoined. "I saw some papers, tied round with pink tape, on the table; I did not notice them particularly. I pray you not to make me think about that afternoon, or you will have me in hysterics again."

"It is not possible—your ladyship will pardon me—that it can have caught your dress in any way, and so have been carried down stairs and out of the house, and—perhaps—lost in the street?" I persisted slowly, looking at her.

Looking at her: but I could detect no emotion on her face; no drooping of the eye; no rise or fall of colour, such as one, guilty, would have been likely to display. She appeared to take my question literally, and to see nothing beyond it.

"I cannot tell anything about it, Mr. Strange. Had my dress been covered with parchments, I was in too much terror to notice them. Your clerks would be more able to answer you than I, for they had to assist me down to my carriage. But how should a parchment become attached to a lady's dress?" she added, shaking out the folds of her ample skirts. "The crape is quite soft, you perceive. Touch it."

"Quite so," I assented, advancing for a half moment the extreme tip of my forefinger.

"You will take a glass of wine? Now don't say no. Why can't you be sociable?"

"Not any wine, thank you," I answered with a laugh. "We lawyers have to keep our heads clear, Lady Clavering: we should not do that if we took wine in the day-time."

"Sit still, pray. You have scarcely been here five minutes. I want to speak to you, too, upon a matter of business."

So I resumed my seat, and waited. She was looking at me very earnestly.

"It is about those missing letters of mine. Have you searched for them, Mr. Strange?"

"Partially. I do not think we hold any. There are none amongst the Clavering papers."

"Why do you say 'partially?'" she questioned.

"I have not had time to search amongst the packets of letters in Mr. Brightman's cupboards and places. But I think if there were any of your letters in our possession they would have been with the Clavering papers."

Her gaze again sought mine for a moment, and then faded to vacancy. "I wonder if he burnt them?" she dreamily uttered.

"Who? Mr. Brightman?"

"No; my husband. You must look *everywhere*, Mr. Strange. If those letters are in existence, I must have them. You will look?"

"Certainly I will."

"I shall remain in town until I hear from you. You *will* go, then!"

"One more question ere I do go, Lady Clavering. Have you positively no recollection of seeing this lost parchment?"

She looked surprised at my pertinacity. "If I had, I should say so. I do not think I saw anything of the sort. But if I had seen it, the subsequent fright would have taken it clean out of my memory."

So I wished her good morning and departed. "It is not Lady Clavering," I exclaimed to Lennard, when I reached home.

"Are you sure of that, Mr. Strange?"

"I think so. I judge by her manner: it is only consistent with perfect innocence. In truth, Lennard, I begin to see that I was foolish to have doubted her at all, the circumstances surrounding it are so intensely improbable."

And yet, even while I spoke, something of the suspicion crept into my mind again. So prone to inconsistency is the human heart.

(*To be continued.*)

THE LADIES' BATH.

THE desire for Arcadian simplicity of life would of itself lure only the very few; but to prove that a veritable Medea's Cauldron exists in the midst of some absolute nineteenth century Arcadia is to entice many of the gentler sex to endure the one for the sake of the other.

If Sir Philip Sidney could have located his Arcadia, as I can the one of which I am about to tell you; and if he could have placed therein what kind nature has given to mine—a rejuvenating fountain, and universal beauty restorer—there is no doubt it would have been colonised far more speedily than was even the Eldorado of that date. Then why has not my Arcadia been already over-run? And why are not its English visitors every summer more plentiful than bees in a clover field? For the simple reason that the place is so little known to the generality of English health-seekers.

It is hidden away in a richly wooded nook of the Taunus Mountains, just above the famous Rhine-gau; so altogether out of the world, so far from the beaten track of tourists and pleasure-seekers, that the snort of the engine is unknown there, and you must drive several miles from Eltville-on-the-Rhine in order to reach it.

This is the shortest route, but if you wish to see more of the high table-land of this little Duchy of Nassau, and do not object to a drive of some length, but rich in interest, you may reach it from Ems, which will take nearly the whole day; or from Wiesbaden, in which case you must cross one of the wooded heights of the Taunus Mountains, and a lovelier drive cannot be imagined. I have approached it by all three routes, and know well the charms of each.

Not to be misleading, I must state that the modern name of this sylvan retreat is not Arcadia, but Schlangenbad—the Serpents' Bath; or, as it is very frequently called on account of one special effect of the application of the waters, the Ladies' Bath. The first connection between woman and the snake, as we know, was not a very happy one; but here the snakes seem to be bent upon retrieving their bad character, and upon becoming a blessing instead of a bane; for the popular belief for ages was that the snakes which abound in the vicinity of the springs—pretty, harmless creatures—imparted some mysterious quality to the waters.

But modern science, that cruel destroyer of all pretty myths and fancies, declares their effect to be due to the fact—as one of the physicians of Schlangenbad kindly writes me—that "the skin absorbs almost all of the elements held in solution by the water." The purity of the Schlangenbad water is extreme. It has a bluish tint, is absolutely free from smell, and very soft to the touch.

The first regular bathing-house was built about the middle of the seventeenth century. A little later the famous springs were in the possession of the Landgraves of Hesse, one of whom built the Oberes Kur-Haus. Then the Elector of Mainz built the Nassauer-Hof, the present restaurant for all the royal houses. So between the Electors and Landgraves the green little valley became both lively and fashionable. Long avenues of hornbeam trees were planted, and princes, knights and ladies bathed, revelled and enjoyed themselves.

In 1816 it passed into the possession of the Dukes of Nassau ; and again, in 1866, it changed hands, becoming the property of the Prussian crown.

The consequence of this royal monopoly is that almost everything is regulated by an official tariff. Even the very laundresses have their prices fixed for them, and may not, even if they would, overcharge. One cannot help wishing that the same system of things existed in our own watering-places, where the visitors are altogether at the mercy of extortionate lodging-house keepers and others. Here, in this happy valley, the chaise drivers, and even the donkey-men, are obliged to produce their tax-sheet on demand. The rooms in the Royal Bathing Establishment have their fixed price in the same way (as also, so I am informed, have the private houses), and the sum of each, on a little enamelled medallion, is affixed above every door.

As compared with our own sea-side resorts, the prices for rooms are moderate. In the hope of being able to advise those amongst my country-folk who may be tempted to try Schlangenbad for themselves in the coming season, I went through all the buildings of the Royal Establishment, and inspected the rooms, baths, etc.

Be it remembered that the whole habits of life here are different from our own : a sitting-room is a luxury, and often a very superfluous one ; never a necessity. One dines and sups in the public room ; and morning and afternoon coffee or tea are served in one's own room, which is as much a sitting as a sleeping-room ; or on one or other of the terraces, or in the shady nooks in gardens and shrubberies.

In the Nassauer-Hof the prices of bedrooms vary from one to six marks a day ; in the other houses from one to eighteen marks. In the Oberes is a quaintly old-fashioned, but most comfortable suite of rooms, with staircase leading down to a private bath. These are let *en suite* for seventeen marks a day, and are known as the Prince's Apartments.

The Mittleres is the largest of the royal houses. It is three stories high, and the range of eighteen baths on the lower floor are white-tiled and most luxurious. On the first floor are large and lofty salons with balconies to the windows ; the salons are from eight to ten marks per day, the bedrooms *en suite*, three marks. The upper floors are proportionately cheaper. In the Unteres is the magnificent suite of rooms occupied by the aged Empress of Germany last year ;

and very princely rooms they are, with lovely views of the green, smiling valley, and lofty wooded heights from the balconied windows. Here are twenty-one baths luxuriously fitted. Besides these houses there is a little Swiss châlet, called the Schweitzerhaus, standing in small grounds by itself, quite idyllic in its picturesqueness. It contains eight doll-like rooms, and an outside staircase running up under its wide eaves. This is let entire for fifteen marks a day, and affords charming accommodation for a family.

There is other accommodation in the valley for visitors besides that which the Royal Establishment provides. Hotels and private houses where the terms are lower still; but as in my visits to Schlangenbad I have always stayed in one or other of the Kur-houses, I cannot speak definitely of these.

One must not suppose that the sole, or even the chief use of the waters of the Schlangenbad is as a cosmetic, although thousands of bottles of it go yearly to every capital in Europe to be used as a toilet article. As all the physicians of the place are agreed, its effect upon the skin is such as to well merit the name which has been bestowed upon it—the Beauty Bath: but it possesses other and even more marked properties.

"If his brain should require calming, his nerves soothing, and his skin softening, let him glide onward to Schlangenbad," said a genial writer of a quarter of a century ago. And so, with equal appropriateness, it has earned a right to be called *Nervenbad* also. And there are other diseases still, too numerous to mention, that may be greatly ameliorated, if not absolutely cured, by the simple, health-giving properties that exist in both air and water in this secluded and delightful spot. Here is the summing up of the effects of the baths by one qualified by long experience to speak upon the subject:

"They calm and strengthen the nervous system, regulate the circulation of the blood, improve the functions of the skin, promote gently the interchange of matter, and stimulate the agency of the absorbing vessels." But they need to be judiciously and carefully used and administered, under the care and advice of physicians whose time and study have been given to their application; and it would be foolish for anyone to go to Schlangenbad and bathe and drink haphazard.

There is no country in the world surely that possesses more tired brain-workers, who need just such a tranquillising and renovating influence as is to be found in perfection here, than old England does at the present time. And yet the English people I met during my two months' sojourn of last summer might almost be counted on my fingers.

The reason for this is that most patients who need just such restoratives, go abroad under the direction of their doctor or physician: and to the faculty, Schlangenbad, and its pure, life-giving air, its woody heights, its vast surrounding tracts of forest land, and its

healing waters, is a *terra incognita.* And my reason for writing about its beauties and its virtues at all is to stimulate those who need so sorely just what it can give : to seek, and to inquire for themselves.

To tell of its lonely woods, its interminable paths through the forest, its pastoral simplicity of life, its delicious baths, would need a pen steeped in all the language of all the poets. So balmy is the air that you may spend the whole day out-of-doors, from early morning to late night, keeping up a perpetual pic-nic. I often declared, laughingly, that it was a mere farce to have engaged even so much as a bedroom, that all one *needed* was a hammock slung in one of the green glades, out of the way of the snakes, with the trickle of a streamlet for a lullaby.

Those who are satisfied with simple pleasures, who can "think themselves happy when they are quiet and clean," and who love to hold converse with Nature in her holiest sanctuaries, will find this a paradise indeed. But those who cannot be happy without excitement and gaiety had better go elsewhere, nor seek to be made wise with a wisdom they could not comprehend.

Of the neighbourhood of Schlangenbad, of the many walks, rides and drives, I have no space to say one word, and yet they merit a great many. Just one word about the baths themselves, and then I have done.

Are you tired with the strain and stress of this world's toil and competition ? Are you longing, with throbbing pulse and quivering nerves, for freedom for awhile from the galling harness of some daily worry ? Have you accomplished satisfactorily some task that has taxed your powers to the utmost, and left you jaded and weak, wondering vaguely whence will come the recuperative force to fit you in due time for another undertaking ? And do you long for the sleep that knows no waking, and the strength that can never become weakness that you trust will be yours when you enter the unseen land ?

Believe me, you can find no nearer approach to the rest you crave than in the luxury afforded by the Serpents' Bath. As its velvet waters cover your tired limbs, all the cares of this often bitter, and generally weary, world, slip away from you. Unconsciously you begin to quote the Lotus Song, "There is no joy but calm." And, soft as the touch of the water is to your fingers, even so soothing is its effect upon your mind. The throbbing of your pulses subsides, the quivering nerves relax, your faith revives, and it does not take long to convince you that you will soon be able to take up your daily task once more, and faithfully perform it to the end.

M. S.

MRS. FAIRLEIGH'S DREAM.

An Incident in Real Life.

I.

YOU want to know whether I believe in dreams? You think that because I have lived through a longer term than is given to most, I must needs have so much the more experience, and am all the more able to judge. Well, I am not so sure of that. For it seems to me that the present generation have come to live so fast, learn so fast, and think so fast, that their years have expanded to double the value of former times. So that two score of the present day may fairly represent my own person, in the matter of wisdom and experience.

But as to dreams, I hardly like to express an opinion. I know all you would say in favour of dreams, on the authority of Holy Writ. There is Jacob's ladder. There is Pharaoh's dream. There is Daniel's dream; and Joseph and Mary's dream when they were warned to take the infant Jesus into Egypt. And there are others, so many and so striking, that we feel they must have been inspired by a special Providence and for a special purpose.

I have known one who dreamed of an absent brother drowning. He saw him fall over the ship's side into calm water, in mid ocean. He heard the drowning man's cry for help. But no alarm was given, no rope thrown to save him. The ship sailed on unheeding, and the waters closed over the drowning man for ever.

When the ship came to port, it told of the disappearance of one of the passengers on such a night, at such a date, corresponding exactly with that on which the dream was dreamed. But I now ask: What law of nature did this warning obey? If no established law, and it was just an especial interposition of Providence, what purpose did it work out? It could not bring back the dead man to life; nor could that death benefit the living brother one jot; neither could it serve to bring the negligent watch to justice; for no dream would ever be taken as witness in a court of law.

I remember one case, however, when a fearful warning was given in a dream; and being left unheeded, its fulfilment came all too soon, all too true, and all too fatally to the people concerned.

People say it is a great disadvantage to marry late and have children late. I am not so sure of that. My own mother married late, and I am the offspring of what might be termed her old age; while she again was the youngest of ten children, which shows her to have been born a hundred years ago. And I, such as I am, have consequently been thrown into such close contact with the people of the past, that I have gathered their traditions and their teachings fresh from the source—all vivid as life.

This is to tell you that my mother knew the three Miss Gunnings, and often spoke of them to me. One of these ladies married, first the Duke of Hamilton, and afterwards the Duke of Argyle: therefore she was the ancestress of the present Lord Lorne. Another married the Earl of Coventry; and a third, the most beautiful of the three, died young. Her mother used to say that, had she lived, her beauty would have set the world on fire.

Besides these three sisters, there was a brother, who stood as handsome among men as they did among women. Through the interest of his brother-in-law, he was drafted into the army, and in an incredibly short space of time, he rose from grade to grade to the rank of general. But, unlike his sisters, his marriage was not at all fortunate. His wife was always doing something to bring him into trouble, and he could teach her neither through her reason nor her heart, for she had none. Two little girls were born of this union; whom the mother pronounced a bore and sent out to nurse.

The youngest of these, however, was in for luck. A lady happening to pass the nurse's cottage while the child was playing at the door, took a fancy to her, and soon after obtained General Gunning's consent and approval to adopt the nursling altogether. This was Mrs. Fairleigh, a widow lady who had a son in India but no immediate relative near.

The little Helen was, at this time, nothing but a flaxen-haired, rosy-cheeked child; but as she grew up, her nature, under the kindly influence of her adopted mother, expanded into rare loveliness of form. She became as remarkable for her fresh, pretty looks, as for a most amiable disposition and womanly heart.

The eldest little girl did not thrive so well. She grew up under no genial influence, no motherly care. She knew she was not looked after, and she looked after no one in her turn. She was plain, like her mother; but like her mother she could boast of a beautiful hand and arm: a great thing in those days, when it was the fashion to go bare-necked and bare-armed from breakfast till supper.

She and her mother would gamble and racket from one week's end to the other, to the discomfiture of General Gunning, who complained that he had no home. It was the way of fashionable life in those days; but General Gunning could not favour it, and at last he went to Italy, where he died.

Eventually, Miss Gunning married a cousin of my mother's; that Major Plunkett who took part in the rebellion of '98; and, marching upon Dublin with a thousand men under his command, was defeated, and condemned by Lord Castlereagh to perpetual exile.

He was one of the Dunsany Plunketts. He came to London and paid his court to Miss Gunning. He thought she had money, and she thought he had money; and, mutually deceiving one another, the marriage took place. It was through him my mother came to know

the Gunnings, and to be present when the dream was related which forms the subject of my theme.

Meanwhile, the old possessor of Fairleigh Manor died; and the next heir being the son of Mrs. Fairleigh, he was immediately summoned from India to take possession of his inheritance. I need not repeat the old story. Helen appeared before the Major in all the bloom of her seventeen summers; a wood nymph as he called her, a fairy, an angel; and to this wood nymph, this fairy, this angel, he offered his hand and heart.

Helen was very fortunate in her marriage. She had all that could make life happy. A husband who adored her, and little children who played about her like the cherubs they were; and she spent her days in the country, devoting herself to them, to her home, and to the tenants of her domain. The poor blessed her as she passed; and when at eventide she went forth, leaning on the arm of her stalwart warrior husband, to wander among the shades and glades of the manor, it was a sight people went out of their way to see.

In an evil hour Mrs. Plunkett, who had hitherto never cared for her sister, now fell into some great money trouble, and, put to her wits' end, she applied to her brother-in-law for help. He, in the generosity of his heart, not only presented her with the relief she sought, but invited her down on a visit to his country seat.

Mrs. Plunkett came, and stayed a long time. For some months she made quite a home of her sister's place, and invited down a friend of hers, not of the most serious type: a certain Lady Rich, who had earned celebrity in the fashionable world by presenting new beauties at court every season. What with flattery, persuasion, importunity and prayer, they both—that is, Mrs. Plunkett and Lady Rich—extracted from the Major a promise that he would bring his wife to London the following season.

Major Fairleigh did not do his duty when he, with his eyes open, delivered over his beautiful innocent wife to the company of as disreputable a set as ever danced a minuet at a court ball.

My mother used to say that it was the most pitiable thing in the world to see how that beautiful, modest, good, simple mistress of Fairleigh Manor got transformed into a bedizened, painted creature; sliding down headlong the way to perdition, like many another in that wicked circle.

II.

THERE was to be a grand ball given in honour of the belle of the season, the beautiful Mrs. Fairleigh. It was to be got up with unusual splendour; and it was even said that possibly Royalty might look in. Princes of the blood would surely be there, and many Highnesses of foreign Courts.

Mrs. Fairleigh of course was anxious to appear in appropriate style; and Lady Rich, who had introduced her at Court, now undertook to

direct her toilette. The most fashionable jewellers brought their merchandise to lay before the queen of the day. Dressmakers petitioned to have a hand in her furbelows, and the most exquisite fancies were invented to win her favour and her choice. At last it began to try her nerves.

"They do bore me so!" she cried in complaint to Lady Rich. "They pester me all day long. I wish they would have done. I have no sooner fixed on one thing than another more beautiful still is set before me! It keeps me in a perpetual fever of excitement. I can't sleep! I never get a wink of sleep now, and I shall never be fit for the ball!"

Lady Rich was a little frightened when she heard her speak thus, so she sent for the family physician, who administered a sleeping-potion to the languishing belle. This was the evening before the ball. Helen slept some hours profoundly, but in the dead of night she awoke.

Great drops of perspiration hung about her forehead; she shook from head to foot, yet could not rise; she could not cry for help; she could not even reach the bell-rope which hung at the head of her bed; and she lay thus in powerless agony till morning, when the maid appeared with the usual cup of tea: but her hand was even then so unsteady that before she could bring it to her lips it was all spilt.

To the maid's question as to whether she did not feel well, she only shed silent tears that coursed down her cheeks one after another. But not a word passed her lips.

There was whispering in the servants' hall that morning, and sighs and lamentations; for the master of the house was out of town, and the domestics were at their wits' ends to know what they should do.

Someone suggested to send for Mrs. Plunkett as the nearest member of the family within call; and the housekeeper herself undertook the charge. But Mrs. Plunkett did not like to be disturbed so early in the day. She called the messenger a fool, and then turned on her side and went to sleep again.

Thus baffled, the housekeeper stepped in next door to speak her troubles to her sister, who was in service there with my mother. The latter, hearing of the dilemma, took coach and went off to Mrs. Gunning, who lived at the other side of the town, and they just arrived in time to see the Doctor turning in also.

They found the belle of the season propped up on pillows and looking not at all her usual self; but mortally ill, pale as death, haggard and discomposed: with a scared look about her eyes as if she had seen a ghost.

The first thing was, of course, to examine what remained of the potion in the glass still on the table. On inspection they were soon satisfied that the liquid was harmless, and could give no possible cause for Mrs. Fairleigh's state.

"We must seek the cause elsewhere," said the man of science. "The lady has had a fright, and a very bad fright too, and I must beg both of you ladies (addressing Mrs. Gunning and my mother) to remain in the room while I try to find out what it could have been."

To do Dr. Harnett justice, he opened the campaign with much caution, and managed so well and so gently that at last he got Mrs. Fairleigh to speak. This was a great gain, seeing that hitherto she had been persistently mute.

"Something has happened in the night," he observed, addressing the patient. "Will you tell me what it was? Did anyone come into your room? Did you hear any noise? Did you see anything?"

At this Helen Fairleigh cried very much, and her voice trembled and choked as she spoke.

"No! it was a dream."

"And what sort of a dream?" asked he, persuasively. "Was it black, blue, red or green? Was it a lion, a tiger, a mad bull or a pussy cat?"

Helen smiled a little; and at last explained that it was a dream to warn her not to go to the ball.

"Just so!" remarked her friend, the Doctor. "Your good angel and I are of the same mind. There must be no more question of this ball. A few days' rest is what you need. A friend, an intimate acquaintance now and then to cheer you up, and you want nothing more. But, meantime, no ball."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when someone knocked at the chamber door, and in swept Lady Rich, with her usual loud, volatile manner, never saying good morning, but dashing into her subject at once.

"Oh, is that you, Doctor Harnett? Where is Helen? What, still in bed! Sleeping beauty in the wood, hey? I have come to look at your dress, dear! Is it come home?"

Mrs. Gunning stood up, stiff as a poker, and answered stern and grave as a judge.

"Mrs. Fairleigh is not going to the ball."

She and Lady Rich did not get on together.

"Indeed! and who decided that?" exclaimed Lady Rich at the top of her voice. Then turning to the Doctor, with daggers in her eyes: "Pray, was it you? I tell you she must go to the ball! And go she should if she were dying," she added, in imperative tones.

The Doctor was no worshipper of Lady Rich. He knew her of old, and they had had many a skirmish before now. Nor was he any the more disposed to bow before her insolent speech.

"Those are hard words to use, madam," he replied; "and I regret to say I must oppose them. I am here as family physician, and I alone have a right to decide on matters pertaining to health. Mrs. Fairleigh cannot stir from here this evening, nor, perhaps, for some evenings to come."

"For some hours to come, you mean!" said the lady, tossing her head and offering battle. "And what, may I ask, is the duty of a doctor, if it is not to enable ladies to go to balls and parties? You gave Helen a sleeping-potion yesterday, and that is what has upset her. Now, do you give her a waking-potion, like a good man, and set her right. I tell you she must go to the ball. I am pledged to it, and she shall go with me," she added, curtseying to emphasize her words.

To which the Doctor, drawing himself up with great dignity, replied: "Be good enough, Lady Rich, to keep within the bounds of good manners! I will not suffer any insinuation from you as to the efficacy of my prescriptions! Please to remember, madam, that I have some care for my reputation." And there was the slightest possible inflection as he spoke the word *my* which she might notice or not, as the humour moved her.

But do you think Lady Rich took offence at these words? Not she! They only provoked her scorn. She laughed at them, and going up to the bed, she asked Mrs. Fairleigh to speak out candidly and say whether it was not the sleeping-potion that upset her.

But the stricken patient shook her head, and eagerly denied it. "It was a dream!" she asserted. "And in that dream I went to the ball and died."

Lady Rich almost danced as she heard these words. She made the room ring with her exclamations.

"A nightmare!" she cried. "Bless my soul, I shall die with laughter! A nightmare! Is that all? Why, I have often had nightmare! The best cure is to go to a ball and dance it off! The remedy, I tell you, is sovereign! Nothing like it. Come with me, Helen, and you shall dance it all away. Yes, Dr. Harnett, you may look at me; but I shall prove a better physician than you!" And then she went off into another peal of laughter.

At this the Doctor, nothing daunted, walked quietly across the room and opened the door.

"Please to take notice," he said, "that I am here by the choice of Major Fairleigh, master of this house—not you, Lady Rich. I cannot allow these altercations to go on in a sick-room. Be good enough to postpone your visit to a fitter moment."

And he held the door open for Lady Rich to pass out. Out she went, quick enough, too, her face all purple with rage. Perhaps she expected Mrs. Gunning would have taken her part, or that Mrs. Fairleigh would have remonstrated. But if she did, she was mistaken.

And yet not vanquished, for she did not leave the house, but locked herself up somewhere until she was sure the Doctor was gone. Then she slipped upstairs, and burst into the room.

The maid was at this moment standing by the bedside, having set down a tray of refreshments on the table near it. Mrs. Fairleigh was taking some wine.

Lady Rich seemed greatly to approve this move, and without offer-

ing the smallest apology for the intrusion, she rattled away as if nothing had happened.

"I am so glad to see you eating; that is what you wanted and what you should have done before, but for that insufferable old quack you had here! Now you begin to look yourself again. Where is your dress, dear Helen? I want to look at it."

"But," pleaded the invalid, "I am not going to the ball! It turns me faint to hear you speak of it."

"Not go to the ball that is given in your honour! And what excuse am I to make for your absence? That you had the nightmare? that you saw a ghost?"

"You can tell them the truth. I am ill!"

"You ill, indeed! I like to hear you say that. Yes, you were a little pale at first, but you are all right now. Your cheeks are coming back to their colour already. And for the rest, were I as mum as the dead, the truth would ooze out through the servants. Would it not, Abigail?" she said, addressing the maid as she was leaving the room.

Abigail smiled, and said she was glad to see her lady looking so well again.

Alas! thus it happened; that partly to justify her own repugnance to attend the dreaded ball, and partly in the hope of winning over Lady Rich to her view—for she dreaded that lady's sarcasms—poor, weak Mrs. Fairleigh took a glass of wine, perhaps two, hesitated, and at last narrated her dream.

She dreamed that she went to the ball—the admired of all admirers. Her partners were princes, and she was surrounded with so much homage, and offered so much incense, that she felt lifted above the ordinary herd of mortals. Flattery that night had ceased to move her.

As the hours wore on, the heat of those crowded rooms became more and more oppressive. Her head began to ache, and the pain increasing, she grew unsteady on her feet. Her partner, perceiving this, took her down to the supper-room to have a glass of wine. But before she could even grasp the proffered cup, she swayed, bent, reeled a little, and fell fainting on the floor.

In the bustle and confusion which followed it was not possible to find her carriage, perhaps it had not come; and after much trouble and anxiety, a hackney coach was procured, into which she was lifted and conveyed home. She was placed on her bed and administered to; physicians were sent for, and friends surrounded her, but she knew her days were numbered and that her end was near.

At last it came, that solemn end; she died. She left the body she had inhabited—she left the earth, and was wafted, she knew not how, to the judgment seat of God.

There were no details; nothing here she could remember to describe; only from out the indescribable, a voice reached her

inmost sense, demanding what she had done with her life—that most precious gift of Heaven to the moulded clay—that most solemn charge to mortal, for the good of others. To give, to take, to join in the general push of universal progress—what had she done on her part? What had she done to aid her children? What had she done to aid her husband? What had she done to aid the struggles of others?

She saw as in a mirror; and it came to her with a rush in one comprehensive view, all the vanity of the life she had adopted, and how it rendered null the good days of Fairleigh Manor! She knew that in this consciousness lay her own condemnation and her punishment. She saw the earth slip away from beneath her. She saw it glide into distance with the moon and sun, till they were seen no more. She saw the firmament roll up like a scroll till the last star had vanished; and she was still falling. Darkness unfathomable, an eternity of solitude, a silence of boundless nothing—and still she went on falling. Outside life, outside creation, outside God. There in the midst, she felt herself an infinitesimal speck of concentrated agony of terror, and still she went on falling.

And then the dreamer awoke.

"And now," said the narrator as she finished, and turned to Lady Rich, "now can you wonder at the state I am in? Can you wonder at my horror of the ball? Would you not feel as I do? I tell you, my hair stands on end as I think of it. I shall lose my senses if you persist in talking of it. And the long and short of it is, I won't go."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Lady Rich, tossing her head with her usual levity. "I grant that your nightmare is very thrilling. All the same, my dear, I think you intensely silly. A nightmare is not a reason for keeping a lovely woman from a ball given in her honour. And, to say the truth, your absence would be such a breach of good breeding that I should be ashamed to own you ever after, or be seen with you. And now, I want to see your dress," she continued in a rattling interrogatory. "Where is it? In the dressing-room, here? Yes! oh, how lovely! I never saw anything so exquisite! Why, you will have all the men at your feet and all the women dying of envy."

Saying which, she came up to the bedside with a feather in her hand, trying it on herself.

Meanwhile Mrs. Gunning had said nothing. The fact is, Lady Rich systematically snubbed this lady whenever she met her, whether in public or in private; and especially here at Mrs. Fairleigh's, she ignored her presence as completely as if she never existed.

I own I have often spoken severely of Mrs. Gunning; and she deserved it. Still I must do her the justice to say that on this particular occasion she tried to do her duty. When Lady Rich essayed to talk Mrs. Fairleigh into going to the ball, despite the

Doctor's express prohibition, every line of her face and attitude was expressive of disapproval. And just as Lady Rich approached the bedside, she adroitly slipped behind her, and locked the dressing-room door; then put the key into her reticule. For in those days ladies used to keep their pocket-handkerchiefs and keys in reticules, or netted bags, slung on the arm.

Well, fashionable ladies sometimes forget themselves, in more ways than one, and this is all I can say in apology for the indescribable scene I am going to relate.

Two ladies well known in the court circles of the day; in the presence of a patient suffering from overstrained nerves; behold these ladies raising their voices, unwarrantably loudly, bandying words with one another; calling one another names, and ordering one another out of a house which was not theirs. And what is worse and more amazing still, they both, from opposite sides of the bed, rushed at the bell-rope, at one and the same moment, and tore it out of one another's hands so violently that it came down with a crash over Mrs. Fairleigh's head.

I don't know whether it hurt her; but she was so upset with the number of servants who hurried upstairs to see what was the matter, and so alarmed at the warlike demonstrations of the two belligerents, that she turned to her mother, as the easiest to deal with, and entreated her to go home for the present, and return in the evening, when she and her friend—my own mother—might, if possible, spend the night with her.

This was acceded to on one condition—that Mrs. Fairleigh should give her sacred promise not to stir from the house till their return.

With this assurance, Mrs. Gunning and my mother went their way, leaving the field to Lady Rich; which, to say the least of it, was bad generalship, and an egregious mistake.

The two ladies did not separate. They agreed to dine together and keep one another company till nine. But when they returned, according to agreement, and reached Mrs. Fairleigh's house, the bird had flown.

Great was their consternation. They summoned the maid to question her. Abigail reported that Lady Rich had never left the house at all. She sent home for her ball-dress and things, and made her toilette there. Mrs. Fairleigh had got up and dressed too. She had never looked so beautiful.

"But how did she get her dress?" asked Mrs. Gunning in amaze. "I had the key in my bag."

Abigail answered that she supposed that was the reason they sent for the locksmith, for the room was open at that moment.

"But it is too early to go to a ball!" remarked Mrs. Gunning.

Abigail said she thought her lady and Lady Rich were going somewhere else first; she heard them say as much.

Mrs. Gunning turned to my mother in dismay. "Suppose anything were to happen to her, as it did in her dream?"

"Dreams always go by contraries," urged my mother, quoting an Irish proverb by way of consolation. "Suppose we sit up!"

It was late in January and the weather was still cold and raw. But a good fire brought warmth into the room where they sat, and with cards, supper and gossip, they managed to while away the time while they watched.

At half-past twelve a thundering knock came to the door, startling sleepers and wakers alike. It was a hackney coach with a gentleman sitting by the driver. Two women strode out of the inside, and between the three, they managed to carry in the unconscious form of Mrs. Fairleigh.

Doctor Harnett was sent for, and he did not leave the house till morning, trying his best all the while to bring her back to consciousness. But nothing could save her. Once, and once only, she opened her eyes and called for her husband. Alas, he was far away in the country; and only reached his home to see her borne away on the bier that came to fetch her to the churchyard.

It made a tremendous sensation in the fashionable world, and for days nothing else was spoken of. It was said that at the ball Mrs. Fairleigh had been voted far more beautiful than either of her aunts; her eyes were finer than Lady Coventry's, and her complexion fresher and more delicate than the Duchess of Argyle's. Her hair, too, was the most beautiful that ever was seen.

Monodies were written on her early death, as there had been on the early death of Lady Coventry; and for some short time the tragedy caused such a sensation as to throw a damp over the gaieties of the season, and perhaps recalled many a giddy wife to her home and her duties. At least we may hope so.

And even here, my story, cropping up unexpectedly after such a long lapse of years—who knows what serious thought it may induce. For nothing is ever lost. The past is never past; it is but the bud which holds the present; as the present is the flower which holds the fruit which shall yield and scatter its seed to all eternity.

M. F. W.

STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

A SEA STORY.

By Thomas Woolner, R.A.

I KNOW of no greater pleasure than to chat with good-tempered, intelligent sailors who, enriched by experience in their perilous duties, show in their observations the fresh stamp of individuality. To enjoy this was my good fortune from July 24 to October 27 in the year 1852.

Tired of what then seemed to me the monotony of civilisation, and pricked by a spirit of adventure, I joined two artist friends and took passage in the good ship *Windsor*, bound for Port Phillip, in Victoria, our intention being to try our fortune in the Gold Fields there. Soon after leaving Plymouth we ran into what the sailors called "a nasty cross swell," in which the vessel pitched and shook so violently, that nearly all the passengers on board, for imperative reasons, sought their cabins, where, the scuttles being fastened close, the confined atmosphere made them worse than they were in the open air. We who remained on deck were continually washed with heavy spray that dashed over the bulwarks; but the appearance of the sea being wild and exhilarating we only took heed of our wetting as a necessary part of the entertainment.

In a few days, having arranged our cabin comfortably, we had plenty of leisure to read, watch the waves and the clouds, discuss our prospects with other passengers, and, as occasion offered, chat with the sailors, with whom I soon became on very friendly terms. On days when the vessel was moderately steady, I used often to sketch likenesses of the officers and others, and these sketches gave considerable amusement on board.

Charley Webb, who had by irregularities been reduced from the dignity of skipper to an able-bodied seamen, came to me one day with a mysterious air and mumbled out that he had a great favour to ask, and if I would be so good he should be very much obliged. The truth was, at Demerara was an old black gal who was very partial to him; and he knew nothing in the world would please her so much as a bit of a likeness of her Charley. Would I just take his figurehead off a bit for her? When he got to Sydney he should be sure to find some old shipmate who would be going to Demerara, and he could get him to take his likeness to the old gal.

Charley was a favourite of mine and I took unusual pains with his portrait, finishing it more carefully than I had done any of the others. The result was a likeness as exact as I was able to make it. One

of my friends mounted it on tinted paper with gilded lines and secured it under glass so that it looked presentable and compact. Old Charley was the idol of all the other sailors, and their verdict was unanimous in praise of his likeness, and by this I became so especially popular with them that everything I said or did was sure to be right. Indeed, they carried their admiration so far that on rainy nights when I joined them in the forecastle to smoke and yarn, they told me I ought to have been a sailor. It was a pity I wasn't. I was in fact a good sailor spoiled.

Among my sailor friends was one I name Lee. He had singularly small, white hands, and though doing his work as well as the rest, I rather wondered at there being so much power in those delicate proportions.

One Sunday Lee appeared at the capstan in his daily costume to attend morning service, and was reprimanded by the Captain for "coming dirtily dressed to prayers." In this the Captain was mistaken, for although Lee was in an ordinary working blouse, it was as clean as it could be; and to my picture-loving eyes he looked as natural and as proper as a man could look.

On the Sunday following my friend appeared in magnificent attire. White duck trousers, a handsome blue frock coat, black waistcoat, silk necktie, black kid gloves, black beaver hat, fine boots, and a handsome cane. After service Lee received a lecture from the Captain "for making a buffoon of himself;" whereat he was, or affected to be, highly indignant, having taken so much trouble to appear smart.

One day, having Lee to myself, and wanting to understand the secret of those neatly made hands and superior manners, I asked for an account of his life. He told me that he was the son of a clergyman in Devonshire; and being of an unruly disposition, when a boy he ran away to sea, where he had remained ever since; for, being ashamed of what he had done, he had never returned home.

At that time I was given to phrenology and studying the formation of heads with reference to character; and often during fine evenings upon deck I would examine the heads of sailors and of passengers to tell them their ruling tendencies and dispositions.

Once when it was Lee's turn to have his nature unfolded, I told him that he had ideality in larger proportion than any other faculty, and that, above all things, he was fond of anything charming and beautiful. He owned, in an awkward kind of way, that he was rather fond of pretty things.

"'Rather,'" said I; "your love of beauty has nothing to do with rather. You love pretty things so well you would sooner lose your dinner than miss seeing any beautiful sight."

"No, no," he retorted; "I am not so bad as that. I am fond of such things, but I would not lose my dinner for them. No, no."

He, of course, imagined this disclaimer supported his dignity for

rough manliness, and that I should be satisfied with his faint admission. But he had, in this instance, reckoned without his host; for I began to talk of general subjects, and, after a while, gradually veered towards the beauties of Devonshire scenery: describing the huge forest trees I had seen there; their broad shadows on the grass; undulating glades, barred and mottled with sunshine, tempting onwards to the blue ethereal distance, unless some bright pool, half smothered in flowers, and haunted by innumerable wings, carried attention some other beauty-bewildered way.

"And think of all this scenery," said I, "after a summer shower, when every petal, grass-blade and twig is hung with waterdrops; and, as the sun breaks forth again, every drop, smitten to a little sun, twinkles and burns, and glistens like the great original. Think of all these, and a thousand other delightful things, and then tell me if there is anything else in life to rival them, unless it be a taut ship going, with a spanking breeze, fourteen or sixteen knots an hour."

"You are right," cried Lee. "Many and many a time have I wandered in just such a place when a boy; and many a time have I been wetted through, and walked on till I was dry again; and often have I been scolded for coming in long after dinner-time by my mother, who used to threaten that the next time I was late I should go without any. One day—how well I remember it!—it was so bright and beautiful, I went on from one place to another, farther and farther, till at last it began to be dusk before I thought of turning to go home. And when I did reach home it was so late all there had begun to be alarmed, and were wondering if anything had happened to me. My mother was very angry, and said my conduct was beyond endurance; and, as she had often threatened, now I really should suffer punishment, and have no dinner for my disobedience; and I was actually sent dinnerless to bed."

"So that you really did prefer to lose your dinner than to miss seeing the beautiful sights. That is just what I told you that you would do."

The roars of laughter and merry banter that followed threw poor Lee into sad confusion. His face became red as the wattles of a turkey cock, and he walked away, shaking his head, but saying nothing.

About the middle of October we reached Port Phillip, where the multitude of masts appeared to stretch to an infinite distance. All the vessels of the world seemed there lying peacefully at anchor.

On board our ship nothing could exceed the confusion; packing and unpacking, boxes passing to and fro from the hold, and the universal restlessness of passengers and crew. We had to wait many weary days before we could get a steamer to carry us ashore, so busy were they all in those days of the golden age.

One evening the Captain had all the sailors upon the quarter-deck,

and made them a speech promising good wages and a bonus if they would remain with the ship, and that everything should be done to make them comfortable. There was not much response to these good offers, the men being most of them bitten with the gold fever.

Some time after the Captain had finished his harangue, as the sun was setting, Lee came and said that he wanted to have a talk with me, and I went with him on to the forecastle.

He then in a low voice, not much above a whisper, told me he meant to leave the ship, get a berth in Melbourne for a time, save money, go to the diggings, and get a lot of gold. He should then send for his wife and daughter and regularly settle in the country, and he asked me what I thought of his plan? I demanded what possible good could come of my giving him an opinion if he had already made up his mind what he was going to do?

"But I want to hear what you think," he said.

"Oh, very well. Then if you must know what I think, I consider yours a very bad plan. You engaged to sail to Australia, India and China, and to return to the Thames in the same ship, and in common honesty you are bound to perform your contract. If every man broke his engagement whenever it suited him to do so there would be an end to every enterprise in the world, and we should none of us be able to exist as civilised beings."

He moodily replied that a man was bound to do the best for himself and his family.

"Yes," I said, "that is perfectly true; a man should always do the best for himself and his family; but the question is whether behaving dishonestly is ever doing the best. I think not."

He urged that a man did not often find a chance of making his fortune, and must be a fool to miss one when within his reach. Did I not think so? I told him that I would describe two pictures, and he might select which of them he liked best as an example.

"We will suppose that you get safely away from the ship. You then easily obtain a berth in Melbourne, and receive high wages. After awhile you have saved enough to venture an expedition to the gold-fields, where by hard work, aided by sailor skill and dexterity, you succeed in obtaining a handsome amount of gold. You then send to England for your wife and daughter, enter into some business, and become very prosperous; buy land amidst beautiful scenery, build your house; and, as this is a great country for vines, you may have them trailing over your own doorway, and enjoy the rest of your life surrounded by your own flocks and herds in old-fashioned patriarchal grandeur."

Lee was in high rapture, and said that I had hit off his own thoughts to a T, and that it was exactly what he had been looking forward to. Nothing could please him more.

"Yes," I said, "the picture is pleasant enough so far; but wait until I have finished before taking it entirely to heart. In the evening of

life, resting in the shadow of your patriarchal vine, you may be gladdened with many stalwart sons and graceful daughters; and do you think that, considering the circumstances you can never fail to remember, you will be able to look them in the face and discourse upon the dignity of truth and virtue, and the evil consequences of any deviation from either in the way a father ought to talk to his children? Will not the thought that all your prosperity was based upon a great wrong to your employer check and paralyse all you would say to them? And could a man feel a deeper degradation than in knowing that he dares not speak worthily to his own children?

"This is one picture. I will now give you the other.

"You keep to your engagement and stand by the ship; you go to India and China; you return to England and receive your high wages with likewise the promised bonus. Your diligence has recommended you to the favour of the Captain and officers, who allow you on their next voyage to work your passage out as passenger seaman. You bring with you your wife and child as passengers, and you all arrive safely at Melbourne, where you are soon employed at a salary better than you could ever have reasonably expected. Whether you go to the gold-fields or stay in the town you are sure to be prosperous; and whatever wealth you may then make you can always feel that it is really and truly your own; and at the close of your days you will feel that throughout life you had always done your duty as an honest man."

My friend Lee seemed nervous and jerky, and did not regard the last picture with much complacency; for I suppose it seemed somewhat dull and jog-trot, wholly unlike the visions that had crowded his mind for some time past; and he again asserted that a man should do the best for himself when the chance offered.

I told him that he must please himself; I had put the two ways before him; the wrong way, and the right way. The first seemed pleasant enough, but unfortunately it led to evil; whereas the other was the path of virtue and led to peace and happiness. If he preferred the evil, he knew the way to it. It was no concern of mine which way he went; he had asked for my views, and I had given them; but it rested with himself whether he would take advantage of what he had been told.

I then relit my pipe, which had gone out during our conversation, and left the sailor to think matters over: and should probably, but for the following incident, never have remembered the subject again.

Two days later, about five o'clock in the afternoon, the steamer which was to take us ashore lay alongside, and we were all crowding at the gangway to get on board as soon as we could. While I was awaiting my turn, I felt my coat twitched several times, and on looking round I saw Lee with an agitated countenance, who said he wanted to speak to me. I went with him to the port side of the ship, behind a huge pile of packages, boxes and trunks, where he gripped

my hand and said he should follow my advice. I asked him what advice I had given. He told me it was about not leaving the ship; he meant to stick to her; and he should never forget my words. Poor fellow! his eyes were full of tears. He hung down his head, and giving my hand another hard grip, said: "God bless you; I shall never forget you," and went hurriedly away. I never saw him after.

This occurred in October, 1852.

In January, 1854, I went to New South Wales, having spent the interval mining in the various Fields of Victoria, travelling about the wild, strange country there, and modelling small medallion likenesses in Melbourne.

After I had been some weeks in Sydney, modelling likenesses by day, and in the evenings enjoying the beauties of its matchless harbour, within whose waters the blues of the forget-me-not and the sapphire hold the field in ever-interchanging rivalry, I heard that the *Windsor* was lying in harbour.

I was not long in discovering where she lay, when I took a boat, went on board, and had the gratification of again seeing my friends: the officers and some of the sailors with whom I had spent so much pleasant time. They made numerous inquiries of our shipmates, who were also our gold-digging companions, and of our expeditions, our success and prospects, and of all that friends would know who, endeared by close association, meet after a long absence. I made abundant inquiry concerning the sailors and officers who were not then with the vessel. At length I asked one of the mates if he could tell me what had become of Lee, as I knew that he intended to continue with them during the whole voyage.

"Oh, yes; we had a letter from him about a week ago. When we left Port Phillip, in 1852, he sailed with us to India, and then went on to China, and returned with us to London. He behaved so well during the whole voyage that the Captain and officers were vastly pleased with him. He not only worked well himself but he had great influence with the other men, and helped considerably to keep them in good humour and at their duty. At the end of the cruise he had the whole of his wages to receive together with a handsome bonus; and when we sailed on this voyage he came with us working his way out as a sailor passenger, and bringing his wife and little daughter with him. We left him at Melbourne, and in his letter he says that he got work the day after landing, and that his wages being £5 a-week, he feels very comfortable and happy."

If he is living now I have no doubt he is a prosperous and a happy man. If he should ever read these words he will recognise his own likeness, and I daresay will still hold the advice I gave him in honour. But with whatever feeling of gratitude he may think of me, I feel sure that I shall ever regard him with yet higher respect: for my experience of life has taught me that it is an easier thing to give, than to take and act upon even the wisest advice.

THE EMPRESS VICTORIA OF GERMANY.

THE younger generation are not so rich in memories of the past as their elders—hence they have no personal recollections of the Empress Victoria of Germany, when she, as child and maiden, lived in our midst and made herself a place in the hearts of her mother's subjects.

No child was ever surrounded with more love and tenderness from the day of her birth than was the Princess Royal. And well for her that it was so; for with her characteristics, her special talents and her stern sense of right and wrong, neglect and harshness would have made her too determined, too hard and cold, and her great cleverness, without its robe of gentleness, would have made her life a lonely one.

No parents, whatever their rank in life, could have been more solicitous for their child's welfare than were those of the Princess Royal of England. They fostered the good in her; educated her with a thoroughness which would have seemed wonderful in a previous generation; watched over her recreation and her games; chose her teachers and her servants with every care, and presided over her studies and directed every step of her progress. Every half-hour had its set duty, and from her earliest days she was the constant companion of her father, which was an education in itself.

It was the habit of the Queen to read daily a few verses of the Bible to her little daughter, and on one occasion she came to the verse "And God made man in His own image," when either the child's artistic nature rebelled, or a vein of humour was touched, for she exclaimed, "Oh, mamma, surely not the doctor!" who, it seems, was a very ugly man.

With the cottagers on the Balmoral estate she was quite at home, and an immense favourite; she became familiar with their every-day life, and nothing delighted her more than tying on an apron and stirring the porridge-pot.

One poor Scotchwoman, who was a great favourite of the Princess's, had a baby whom the royal child took under her protection, and as the time for the christening drew near, begged that she might stand god-mother.

The day and hour being fixed, the priest, the baby and all its belongings were assembled in the Presbyterian Church, but no royal god-mother put in an appearance, so another god-mother was selected from among those present and the ceremony proceeded. It was almost concluded when the Princess came in breathless, saying, "Oh! I am so sorry! Could you not do it over again?"

When she was eight years old, the late Emperor, then Prince

of Prussia, paid a visit to our Queen. With him (her future father-in-law) the child became a great favourite ; she walked, rode and drove with him, and there can be no doubt that the first idea of a marriage between her and the young heir of Prussia crossed the minds of the parents, though no expression was given to it.

De Bunsen, on the contrary, asserts that the first suggestion of a union between the two was made in the following manner by his father :—

The Princess—now Dowager Empress—Augusta came to England in 1852 to see her aged relative the Queen Dowager, and it was while waiting for the Princess in an ante-room that he, de Bunsen's father, amused himself by looking over some beautiful engravings which had been sent for the Princess to select from.

Amongst others, he was struck with a very fine picture of Waterloo and the farm-house of "La Belle Alliance," from which the Belgians have named the battle in the foreground.

Seeing several portraits of the Princess Royal and of Prince Frederick about the room, he hastily placed one of each over the large engraving of the battle as he quitted the table to bow to her Royal Highness, Princess Augusta. The first thing, therefore, that attracted her attention were the smiling faces of the Prince and Princess under which was written in large characters "La Belle Alliance." It is said that a rapid glance was exchanged between them, but no word spoken.

Of course it was but natural that there should have been many suitors for the hand of our Princess ; and it is believed that had the King of Sardinia been a Protestant he would have had the best chance, for Prussia at this time did not stand well with England, having given offence during the Russian war; and it is said that but for the ingredient of Protestantism, Prince Frederick would scarcely have gained his suit. But surely England would have put politics on one side when she saw the strong affection existing between the Prince and Princess. We are a sentimental nation, and rejoice in a love match.

In the several visits paid by Prince Frederick to the English Court he made himself very dear to the Queen and Prince Albert, and popular personally with the people.

It was when the Princess was fifteen that he asked permission to press his suit, but Prince Albert, though giving his full consent and that of the Queen, did not like his child to be disturbed previous to her confirmation, and begged he would delay his declaration of love to the Princess, if possible, until that should have taken place.

But the Princess, who was very observant, saw that there was a secret, and soon heard from the Prince's lips what it was. He told his tale on an old bridge while walking out with her, presenting her at the same time with a spray of white heather, that emblem of purity

and good luck : and so it happened that the heir to the Prussian throne left Balmoral on the 1st October, 1855, an engaged man, he being twenty years of age and she fifteen.

The engagement, however, was to be kept a strict secret, because of the bride's youth. It was the old, old story, as full of romance in the palace as in the cottage.

On returning to Berlin after his engagement, his father asked him what he really thought of his future bride. The answer the Prince made was a very earnest one, coming as it did from so young a man.

"In my position," he said, "and with my future destinies, my special duty is to consider the mind, character and tendencies of my future consort infinitely more than external appearance. The latter won my heart, the former my admiration and profound respect. They are such as will, I think, ensure my domestic happiness, and win for us both the love and esteem of the Prussian nation."

During the two years which intervened between the engagement and the marriage, the Prince paid several short visits to England, and was as much like any other lover as well could be. In his absence the Princess went about charming everyone by her sweet and kindly manner. As an illustration of this I give the following.

About nine o'clock one cold, foggy morning in February, a royal carriage drew up to the Mint on Tower Hill, and out stepped the Princess Royal, followed by a lady and two gentlemen. At this hour none of the principal officers had arrived, and the only person there happened to be Mr. Newton, the senior officer on duty, therefore on him devolved the duty of conducting her and her companions through the coining-rooms, and explaining the various processes through which the metal passed.

Not having much knowledge of court etiquette, Mr. Newton felt very much embarrassed in addressing the Princess, and seeing this she said in the kindest manner, "Will you please to waive all ceremony, and treat me exactly as you would any lady friend of your own who had called unexpectedly and wished to study the art of money-making."

This kind, frank speech put Mr. Newton at his ease, and he says a more agreeable task he never had than in giving the Crown Princess lessons in the method of converting precious metals into current coin of the realm. On leaving she thanked him very much and said, "I shall never spend a sovereign again without thinking of you and the trouble you take in making money for the public."

The marriage took place in the Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace, in the winter of 1858. The Princess had eight bridesmaids, who were also her intimate friends. Their costume, which was of white tulle with wreaths and bouquets of roses and white heather, was designed by the Princess herself, and gave proof of her good taste and artistic skill.

Her own dress was of white moire, trimmed with Honiton lace and bouquets of orange blossom and myrtle; her veil, also, was of Honiton, the pattern being the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle.

The newly-married pair spent the first few days in Windsor, but on the 2nd of February, eight days after the wedding, the Princess Royal took leave of father and mother and the home of her childhood, and with her husband began the journey which was to take her to another land and people, and to an entirely different home-life to that she was leaving.

Prussia, in the centre of which the newly-married pair were to establish their home, was then as now, a highly intellectual but above all a military nation, a nation with an unbounded belief in its own superiority over other nations.

Perhaps it is owing to the military character of its people that princesses and women generally have never found so much favour in Prussia as princes and men; and also that domestic life is less valued here than in England; otherwise it would be unaccountable, for some of its princesses and queens have been angels of goodness. And of its women one need only relate one anecdote to show their heroism, their self-sacrifice, and their desire to share in the burdens of their country.

During the war with the great Napoleon, when boys and old men even rushed to arms; when he who could not enter the ranks gave his money; and he who had no money, gave his labour, the Prussian women were no whit behind. Perceiving that the exchequer could not hold out, they came forward and poured in of their costly jewels to the treasury, and for these free gifts of almost inestimable value, each received a simple *iron cross*, and these same iron crosses have become the most valued heirlooms in many of the old Prussian families.

The order of the "Iron Cross" is now one of the most noble in Germany, yet the heroism which gave rise to it is almost forgotten, or, if remembered, regarded with indifference.

It is easy to see, therefore, that the life of our Princess amongst these people would be difficult, and to find favour in their sight an almost impossible thing, unless, indeed, she could forget her own nationality and her father's house, and become in tastes, sympathy, affections and politics a Prussian of the Prussians. This would have been no easy task for an older and more experienced person; but for a girl of our Princess's age and character—her intense love of England—her great talents, her love of having her own way—it was an impossibility.

There was nothing in her reception to find fault with; indeed, her entrance into Berlin was like a joyful triumph.

All the ladies attached to her service were Germans of high degree, with one exception, and this was an English lady to act as amanuensis and English reader of correspondence: an appointment due to the thoughtful kindness of her father-in-law, the late Emperor.

The principal residence of the newly-married pair was to be in Berlin, in what is called the old King's Palace; a quaint building, half cottage and half palace; but not being quite ready to receive them, they had, for a short time, those apartments in the Royal Schloss which had been used by the Prince and Princess of Prussia, and by their daughter and son-in-law, the Grand Duke and Duchess of Baden during their honeymoons.

The Princess had scarcely settled down among her husband's people, when they discovered that, like their former Queen Louise, she would not be trammelled and kept in chains by the strict and tedious court etiquette, which obtained in Prussia to a greater extent than in any other country. She would neither subject herself to the Master of Ceremonies nor to the *Oberhofmeisterin*, but made it clear that, like her mother in England, she intended to hold the reins of her household in her own hands. She, with her brothers and sisters, had been taught to keep their own boxes and drawers tidy and orderly. This she continued to do after her marriage, and when the *Oberhofmeisterin* begged her not to do this, as it was derogatory to the dignity of her new position, she answered by locking all her drawers and putting the keys in her pocket.

Our Princess was great-minded, and the petty rules of etiquette fretted her, and, strange though it may seem, this built up a barrier between her and the majority of the people.

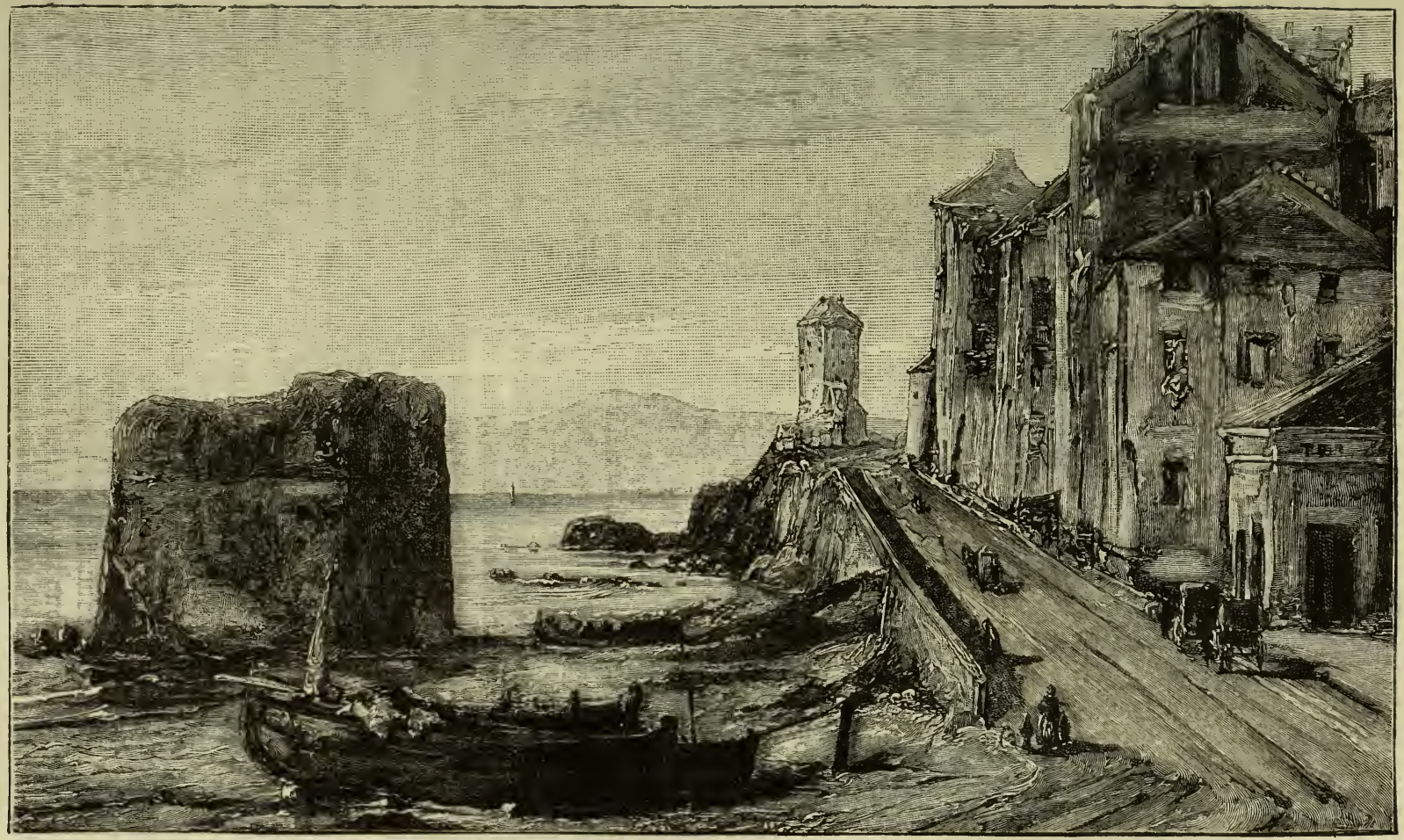
But she possessed to the full the love and passionate admiration of her husband, who has been heard frequently to say, "We will ask my wife; she knows how to do everything." Even this has been a cause of dissatisfaction among some, and these not a few, who declare that his love for his wife has made him almost English.

And thus the early months of her married life went by, made very happy by the love of her husband, and the affection which sprang up between herself and the Princess Charles (sister of the Empress) and her accomplished daughter-in-law, Princess Frederick Charles (the mother of our Duchess of Connaught). This last lady and our Princess were constantly together, having the same tastes and sympathies, and delighting equally in the society of clever people who frequented Princess Charles's salon, among whom Humboldt was a constant visitor. Each of these ladies had a studio in her home, where she worked assiduously, and thus it happened that the letter which went home daily to the mother, and weekly to the father, told of a bright, happy and busy life.

Prince Albert, the good and loving father, never lost an opportunity of strengthening his child in her daily duties, and preparing her to bear with calmness anything unpleasant which should cross her path. In one of his letters he remarks:

"The public, just because it has been rapturous, may now grow minutely critical. This need cause you no uneasiness."

He begs her also to overlook her household, like a good house-



PEGLI, NEAR GENOA.—*Drawn by the Empress Victoria.*

wife, with punctuality, method and vigilant care, and not to forget that in the affairs of life the apportionment of time is essential. And no one can doubt, who has had the privilege of belonging to her household, that the Princess carried out his wishes for her to the utmost. She managed her household herself, as any lady of ordinary rank would do, with simplicity and economy.

It came to her knowledge, soon after her marriage, that one of her housemaids went about her work, brush and dustpan in hand, with a flounced dress, and hair dressed in the height of fashion; so she sent for the maid one morning into her own particular room, and made her a present of a brown woollen dress and a white cap, both carefully and prettily made, and told her that for the future she must wear these about her work.

This particular room of hers looked very English. She had decorated it with the busts of her parents, and the many ornaments she had brought from home, exactly as any other newly-married woman would have done of whatever rank.

As the time drew near for the birth of her first child, she made all the preparations herself—made also her own choice of those who were to nurse and tend the baby, and performed a very popular act when she chose a German "*Wrege Frau.*"

Great was the joy when on the 27th January, 1859, Field-Marshal von Wrangel came out on the balcony of the palace and proclaimed to the crowds waiting below for news, "All is well, my children; it is as sturdy a little recruit as heart could wish to see."

The first great sorrow of her life was the loss of her father. Who can wonder at the effect upon her, seeing what he had been to her from her earliest years?

He had written one of his characteristic letters to her on her birthday a few weeks before his death, full of love and tender solicitude for her. In it he bade her "spare herself, and nurse herself, and get completely well," for she had caught cold at her father-in-law's coronation.

She and her husband had been Crown Prince and Princess since January 2, 1861, but the coronation did not take place until October of the same year.

"May your life," writes Prince Albert, "which has begun beautifully, expand still further for the good of others and the contentment of your own mind."

As we watch her daily life, with its difficulties, its opportunities, its joys, its sorrows, for, alas, these last have neither been light nor few, it is impossible to think of her other than a woman of extraordinary talent, extensive education and richness of mind, and it seems as though the very abundance of her intellectual gifts prevents them at times from working harmoniously together.

How can she with all these powers avoid having very decided opinions of her own upon politics as well as upon other sciences?

And that these opinions should occasionally be in opposition to those of her surroundings is of course to be expected. Fortunately she does not look upon politics as her own special province: and so, when she finds her opinions to be in direct opposition to the powers that be, she takes a short holiday into the country, which enables her to hold her own views and prevents the necessity of acquiescing in those of others.

She is not a *woman of the world*, properly so called; she does not care for society, but she uses her power and position in such a way that the poor, the sick, and the world of art adore her, whatever others may do.

In her salon one meets men of letters, of science and art, who are never otherwise to be seen in society. She is ever striving to improve the condition of her own sex and to devise new means and channels of female occupation. In her love of art and encouragement of literature she has always been nobly aided by her husband.

A German speaking of her says, "It is only due to the Crown Princess to say that her influence and example have largely contributed to the making of the German nation." This is high praise indeed from a German.

She herself is a most excellent artist, for, notwithstanding the many pressing duties inseparable from her high position, the Crown Princess has gone on steadily with her drawing and painting, not taking direct instruction, but influenced and built up, as it were, by the greatest artists of the day.

The Art Gallery, which has developed into an imposing building, owes its existence and prosperity to her efforts and influence. As long ago as 1860 the Berlin Academy elected her as member, acknowledging in this deed the value of her sympathy and work to the artist world.

A celebrated artist (A. V. Werner) had the honour of being presented to the Crown Prince and Princess just after his return from the war of 1871, in order that he might show them his sketches of Versailles, and he describes the interview as follows:

"While the Crown Princess looked over my drawings, she held her youngest daughter in her arms, who, in the meantime, played with the iron cross hanging from her father's neck.

"I was astonished at the excellent and clever remarks with which the royal lady accompanied the turning over of the leaves of my portfolio." He goes on to say: "I had formerly seen drawings of hers, and with others had expressed my doubts as to her having really done them, but from this time I had many opportunities of seeing her actually at work, and there could be no longer a doubt."

The Crown Prince and Princess often spent a short holiday in Italy, and in 1875 Werner happened to be in Venice at the same time that they were there. He says she might be seen constantly

either in the Piazza di San Marco or on the Grand Canal, quite alone with her sketch-book.

Sometimes she went to Passini's Atelier, mixing there with other students.

One day it seems the students, with the Crown Princess among them, were painting in water-colours in the Court of San Gregorio, when towards the end the Crown Princess posed herself in a black dress trimmed with white lace, and a Rubens' hat with white feather, leaning against a basket full of onions and fennel, which they borrowed of a lad who was passing. This picture may be seen in many a student's room as a valued remembrance of the days in Venice.

This same artist says he has had many opportunities of looking through the Crown Princess's sketch-book, and that he never ceased to admire the artistic eye which had caught all that was worth most in the view, and expressed it in the most correct manner.

But if we want to see her in her brightest and best character we must see her at home, and this will not be difficult, for she has refused to be walled in with etiquette, and it is quite easy to reach her ; as many a sick person, many a poor artist would testify.

Never was there a better wife and mother. From the very first she has devoted herself to her home and children, and tried to establish a loving, healthy atmosphere in the family life, and to this endeavour she has stood true, though it has brought her many bitter hours in the opposition of the Court and its etiquette. Perhaps with all her determination she would have failed but for the unswerving love and support of the Crown Prince, her husband.

The more children there were in the nursery the happier she seemed, and the more earnest became the task of watching and educating, and though great strictness was exercised there was no lack of love. The children's little dresses were cut out under her own eye, the food prepared according to her order, and their education and their games were equally under her direction.

The Crown Prince accompanied her at least once every day to the nurseries, and often in the early mornings both father and mother would be present while the governess gave her lessons.

These lessons began as early as six o'clock in the summer and seven in winter, and continued until the family breakfast hour, half-past nine. The Crown Princess thought these hours the best in the day for lessons, as they were quiet and free from interruption.

After breakfast a short time was permitted for recreation, and lessons began again, lasting until one. In Berlin the family dinner-hour was five, but in their country house it was two.

Perhaps the happiest part of her married life has been spent on her estate and farm-house of Bornstädt, which was presented to her shortly after her arrival in Berlin by her father-in-law.

Here the whole family have lived the simplest of lives : the mother

attending to her garden and dairy, the father to his prize animals, the children to their gardens, their miniature earthworks and fortifications, and their cricket-field; and all meeting together at their two o'clock dinner.

It has been said that no children have enjoyed the privilege of making others happy more frequently than those of the Crown Prince and Princess. They have had the school children out from Berlin in the summer months, and each member of the Royal Family vied with the other in making the day a pleasant one for them.

They knew all the people round about the estate, and have been the centre of happiness to them all.

The mother has known many sorrows in her married life. She lost a dear little son of eleven years old, and the grief of both parents was great indeed. The Crown Princess's health broke down under it, and she was recommended to try a warmer climate for the winter; so she and the children went to Pegli on the Riviera, which she has so learnt to love and which has given her such abundance of subjects for her pen and pencil.

She has had to endure her husband's absence on the battle-field just like any other wife; and it was during this time she joined her mother-in-law, the present Empress Augusta, in providing nurses and help for the wounded soldiers.

It seems, too, that her husband has never been strong—indeed, he has often been very ill, causing her the deepest anxiety—and now, in this deep affliction, which has come upon her side by side with the great position of Empress, whose heart does not throb with sympathy?

How pathetically she herself spoke of her conflicting duties, only the other day!

"I feel," she said, "that my most sacred duty is to care, as a wife, for my husband in his illness; and I am thoroughly conscious of the duties that I have to undertake as Queen of Prussia and German Empress, and I shall perform them to the best of my power."

Her work, hitherto and to come, is summed up by her in a few words.

"I have always," she says, "kept in view the moral and intellectual education of women, the advance of hygienic domestic arrangements, and I have endeavoured to increase the prosperity of women by opening to them fields for gaining their livelihood: and I hope to attain still more in this direction with the loyal co-operation of the women of Berlin and of the whole country."

She will have a hard task before her, for the people of Germany are sore upon the point of the English doctor having been called in to minister to their beloved emperor, and have in their soreness laid it upon her shoulders.

This mistake will be cleared up when the truth is known that she had little or nothing to do with it. Her sorrow is great enough; let

no man or woman in her empire add a straw's weight to it. Even as I write, she is being cheered by the receipt of baskets of lilies and violets from ladies who express the wish that she may be rewarded for her great devotion and solicitude by the speedy recovery of her husband.

Her only fault, if fault it be, since her marriage, is that she could not forget the old land and the people among whom she was born and brought up. It was told me as a serious grievance that she had even used the present of money given her on her silver wedding by the Germans to build an English church in Berlin! But the Germans are a great people and generous, and will cease to think of small matters when their Empress needs their love, support, sympathy and approbation.

E. B.

THE MOORLAND BY THE SEA.

Oh, the moorland by the sea, where the purple heather groweth,
And the bracken rears its crozier midst the mosses and the ling—
Where the brown bee croons its song as it gaily homeward goeth,
And the wheeling sea bird stoopeth the white wonder of its wing.

Oh, the incense-breathing firs! the great firs that skirt the moorland,
Shedding perfume all about it, from soft surging plumes of green,
That with strong protecting arms, leaning inward from the foreland,
Let the tender, warm sea-azure, here and there slip in between.

There the little islets lie bright and fair beyond all telling,
In a ring of fairy foam bells that for ever round them play,
And the sea gulls' plaintive cry echoes o'er their rocky dwelling,
And the warm wind lightly ruffles the calm surface of the bay.

Oh, the moorland by the sea! The red sun in gallant splendour
Drops his morning kiss upon it, ere he goeth on his way,
Or athwart its gold and purple steals a benediction tender,
Ere night's starry curtains shroud him at the dewy close of day.

When he dies the fleecy clouds that come floating up from leeward,
With the gorgeous hues of crimson that become his royal state,
And they pass above our heads and go slowly sailing seaward,
Like a flock of angels' pinions up to heaven's golden gate!

Oh, my fancy roameth yet to those lovely far off places,
And the honey-scent of heather yet brings back again to me
Many a mem'ry sweet and dear of kind hearts and friendly faces,
That I met in days departed on the moorland by the sea!

Helen Marion Burnside.

"WITH LOVE."

IT was on the Monday of the Christmas week—Christmas day that year falling on a Friday—that young Graham went down to the station to see his friend Geoffrey Lambert off to London. Lambert had been having a few days' shooting, only rabbit shooting, for that was all that Graham could give him, but it is not such bad sport, after all, especially if you are comfortably housed at night in a bachelor's snug quarters.

But the little holiday was over, and he was due in London in good time that morning.

"Wish you could have stayed over Christmas, old boy," said Graham, as they strolled up and down the platform.

"Wish I could," echoed Lambert; "but the mater expects me to spend it in the bosom of my family, and uncommonly dull it is there!"

"I daresay," Graham admitted absently. And then suddenly and hurriedly he jerked out:

"I say, you are a regular man about town, and have lots of sisters and all that sort of thing; I wish you would go to the shop where they get their very best gloves, and buy me half-a-dozen pairs—sixes—and have them put into a stylish box or case or something of the sort, and post them down to me at once. I—I—want them. Sorry to bother you, but you will do this for me; and then send along the bill and I will pay up."

"Only too glad to help you carry out such a praiseworthy idea, and I hope the gloves will have the desired effect. I promise you I will see about them directly. Hullo!" and Lambert here suddenly pulled Graham behind a pillar. "Who would have thought of seeing that chap here!"

"What chap?" asked Graham.

"That short fellow at the other end of the platform. He's a cousin of mine, but I don't want him to see me."

"Oh!" said Graham slowly, having at last discerned the object of Lambert's attention. "I can understand that, and I am sorry to hear he is any relation of yours. I never thought of that, though your names are the same. Yes, he's rather a black sheep. Nobody down here will have anything to say to him."

At that moment the train steamed up, and Lambert jumped in, after wishing his friend "good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Graham through the window. And then like a shy girl, added: "And you won't forget what I asked you to do for me?"

"Not I. Good-bye, again, old man!"

And the two friends parted.

That same afternoon Geoffrey Lambert found time to stroll up Regent Street. There was no need for him to ask his sister's advice as to the best shop for his commission, for he was pretty well up in such things himself, and a sophisticated man of the world compared with honest Graham. He chose the gloves with taste and care; half-a-dozen pairs of pale-coloured, many-buttoned "Suedes," such as would greatly delight any girl's heart; and then he picked out a quaintly-shaped glove case of rose satin, quilted, and in it the shopman laid the gloves neatly.

"Stop a minute," Lambert said, before the case was fastened: "and lend me a pen, will you?"

The pen was handed to him, and taking a card from his card case he scratched out the "Mr." which stood before "Geoffrey Lambert," and wrote above "With love from." This he slipped into the glove case and then instructed the shopman to put it in a cardboard box and send it to young Graham. He paid the bill himself, but instead of enclosing it in the parcel he tore it up, intending that Graham should accept the gloves as a Christmas present.

Two days afterwards Graham wrote one of his usual laconic notes.

"DEAR GEOFF,—Gloves come and gone. Thanks. How much?—Yours, F. G."

For a moment, Lambert, remembering his card, was puzzled by the "how much?" But reflecting that it was probably only Graham's polite way of hesitating to accept the gloves as a present, he paid no attention to the query, and as far as he was concerned supposed the matter at an end.

Meanwhile, poor Graham was enduring a most mortifying disappointment, for a week passed away and he received no acknowledgment of his present from the fair Miss Vincent. The following Sunday he called on her; but as she treated him with nothing more than her usual courtesy and never once referred, by word or by look, to the gloves, he was too shy to make mention of them either. If ever a man felt downcast and dismal, it was Fred Graham as he trudged back through the snow to his lonely diggings.

The day after this, Geoffrey Lambert found two letters lying on his breakfast plate when he came down in the morning. The first he opened was from Graham, short, of course, but somewhat startling.

"DEAR GEOFF,—I am leaving England for Australia. Come to the docks and see me off in the *Austral*, on Jan. 12th.

"Yours, F. G."

So this, then, was the sequel to the little episode of the gloves! "Poor old Fred!" thought Lambert regretfully. "I suppose the silly young woman has said 'no' to him, and he takes it very hard indeed. I was afraid he would. There's not a man I know who

would make a better husband than old Fred. Well, well, women are queer creatures, and heaven preserve me from having anything to do with them!"

But he was so absorbed with thinking of his friend's trouble, that he had nearly finished breakfast before he glanced at his second letter, and then he was more surprised than pleased to recognise the handwriting of his cousin, George Lambert.

"Here's a nuisance!" he said, opening the envelope. But his countenance changed from one of annoyance to considerable surprise when the identical card which he had enclosed in the gloves to Fred Graham dropped out on to his breakfast-plate.

"What the deuce does this mean?" he exclaimed (all these remarks were addressed to himself, for he was breakfasting alone), as he gazed long and steadfastly at the card. He turned it over, he examined it. There was no mistake and no hoax about it, for he would swear to his own peculiar handwriting at any time. But how on earth came the card into his cousin's possession?

By-and-by he condescended to read George's letter, to see if that would enlighten him.

"DEAR GEOFFREY,—The next time you send such messages to a girl, I hope she will not mistake me for you. Here's a nice hole you have got me into, and I hope you will get me out of it as quickly as you can, for the Fair Insulted is pretty mad, I can tell you!

"Your affectionate cousin,

"GEORGE LAMBERT."

The horrible truth flashed suddenly upon Geoffrey. Graham, like the careless chap he was, had never troubled to open the glove-case, and when the girl (whoever she might be) did so, she had been confronted by his fatal card: "With love from Geoffrey Lambert. And the worst was yet to be contemplated. If "Lambert" had been an unknown name to her it would not have been so bad; or even if she had connected it with himself—its rightful owner—but that she should assign the authorship of the card to his odious cousin, this was *the* unbearable point in the whole concern. No wonder the girl was "mad" at receiving such an insult. And then poor Graham and all his suffering! But he should not go to Australia now!

Lambert's first step was to telegraph to his cousin:

"Wire me name and address of the lady. Do nothing else in the matter. I will make it all right. Reply paid."

The answer came back at once:

"Miss Mary Vincent, The Hollies, Bedford."

Early that same afternoon Lambert went down to Bedford. He did not seek the hospitality of Graham's rooms, but put up at the Mitre Hotel and thence sallied forth in search of the Hollies.

At the door, which was opened by a highly respectable looking butler, he asked for Miss Mary Vincent, and on being told that she

was at home, gave the butler his name; he thought it better not to send in his unlucky card; and was shown into a large drawing-room.

There was no one in it, and after waiting a few moments anxiously for the entrance of the lady, he felt disappointed when, the door being opened, the old butler appeared again.

"Miss Mary is sorry, sir, but she says she cannot possibly see you, and that you will understand."

"I am sorry, too," said Lambert, colouring; "very sorry, to have to press my presence upon an unwilling lady; but in this case I must ask you to beg Miss Vincent to see me for a moment; I will not detain her longer." And again he waited alone.

This time, after a longer interval, the door was opened very slowly, and a small, pretty-looking girl came into the room. She was very young and seemed nervous, as no doubt she was; for she did not raise her eyes to look at Lambert until he began:

"I have called to apologise for and to explain away a mistake which has ——"

Then she saw him, and, starting violently, she said:

"I beg your pardon, but you are not Mr. Lambert."

"Excuse me, I am Mr. Geoffrey and not Mr. George Lambert, though the latter is unfortunately my cousin."

"Won't you sit down?" Mary Vincent said quietly, for she knew now that there was some mistake, and that she was not lowering herself by speaking to a man who had voluntarily insulted her. But Geoffrey remained standing, hat in hand, whilst he explained the whole story to her; and though, as he went on, he was more struck by its comic than its tragic element, he told it very gravely and not at all flippantly. Miss Vincent seemed to be almost unstrung by the relief it afforded her to listen to it.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said, in a sweet, grateful, friendly way. "You have changed a most unpleasant affair into a ——" She drew up suddenly, as if afraid of having said too much, and blushed deeply.

"Into a pleasant one, I hope," Lambert said; and then he took his leave of the still embarrassed girl, and found his way to Graham's rooms. There, he not only explained the incident to his friend, but imparted the conclusion he had arrived at from Miss Vincent's behaviour at the end of the interview; and, encouraged by his advice, Graham lost no time in calling at the Hollies.

He abandoned the idea of going to Australia, and before the next Christmas came round Lambert had acted best man, "on the occasion of the marriage of Mr. Frederick Graham to Miss Mary Vincent."

G. H. Fell.

THE INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER.

By Mary E. Penn.

I.

SIX o'clock on a sultry August evening. The bell of the Hôtel du Lion d'Or, at the Picardy town of Mont-St.-Evrard, has just announced to all whom it may concern that dinner is ready, and the habitués of the table-d'-hôte are dropping in leisurely, one by one, to take their accustomed places.

The dining-room windows look out on the broad sunny Market Place, with its ancient Hôtel-de-Ville and gabled houses. At the opposite end of the room a half-glass door opens into the courtyard, on the left-hand side of which is the spacious, raftered kitchen.

The Lion d'Or, though the principal inn of the town, made no pretensions to style. The innkeeper, Jacques Destrée, was wealthy enough to have owned a much more imposing dwelling. But he loved the old house where his people had lived and prospered for generations, and refused to modernise it, even to oblige his pretty daughter, who had returned from her Parisian boarding-school with ambitious views, and a strong distaste for her homely surroundings.

Valérie Destrée was the acknowledged beauty of St. Evrard; but she was far too conscious of her own attractions, the townspeople said, and "gave herself airs" unbecoming to her position; the innkeeper had done a foolish thing, they thought, in making a fine lady of the girl. In this opinion Valérie's mother thoroughly coincided. In the matter of their daughter's education, her easy-going husband had for once ventured to act in opposition to her wishes, and she prophesied that he would live to repent it.

Except on Sundays, when they appeared at the table-d'hôte, Monsieur Destrée and his family dined apart, in Madame's private sanctum—a queer little triangular room, conveniently situated between the dining-room and the kitchen, so that the mistress could keep a vigilant eye on both departments.

"Has your master come in, Rose?" she asked, when, after seeing her guests fairly launched on the first course, she entered this apartment, where a smart servant-girl was laying the cloth.

"Not yet, madame,"

Her mistress shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "He has gone to Bainville market, and has no doubt lost his train, as usual! Well, I shall not wait for him. Tell Mademoiselle Valérie——Oh, here she is," broke off Madame, as her daughter entered: a tall, graceful girl of eighteen, with brilliant dark eyes, a clear, pale complexion, and a pretty, "mutinous" mouth.

"May one ask what you have been doing all the afternoon?"

demanded her mother, with a glance of strong disapproval at the coquettish costume and elaborate coiffure. "Curling your hair?"

"No, I have been reading," the girl answered, taking a leisurely survey of herself in the glass over the chimney-piece before she subsided into her place at table.

"A novel, of course?"

"Yes, and a very good one. Madame Lebrun lent it to me."

"That's a recommendation, truly!" remarked her mother, in a tone which expressed disparagement of both the book and its lender.

"I can't think, mother, why you have taken such a dislike to Madame Lebrun," Valérie said, resentfully. "I am sure no one could be a kinder friend to me than she is."

"Kind! Yes, if it is kindness to flatter you, make you vainer than you are by nature, and give you ideas above your station! Jean Lemartel is quite right: she is about the most dangerous friend you could have."

Valérie coloured and bit her lip. "I wish Jean would be good enough to mind his own business. What right has he to interfere with me?"

"A very good right, Valérie, as your future husband."

"He is not my husband yet, and perhaps never will be; at any rate, I am not bound to obey him before marriage. If he does not approve of me, he can seek a wife elsewhere—and so I shall tell him."

"But you would not be best pleased if he took you at your word," Madame remarked, shrewdly. "Ah, you may toss your head, Valérie, but I know what I'm saying. Jean has been devoted to you for so long that you take his affection as a thing of course; but if he transferred it to someone else,——"

"He is quite welcome to do so," struck in the girl, which called forth a retort from her mother, as she began to ladle out the soup with energy.

"A nice wife you'll make for a farmer! You are of no more use in a house than ——"

"Come, come, wife, that's enough," interrupted a voice at the door. "If the child is not useful, no one can deny that she's ornamental, and there's room in the world for roses as well as cabbages—*hein?*"

It was the innkeeper who spoke—a big, burly man of middle age, with a large, clean-shaven, good-tempered face, and kindly blue eyes which had a humorous twinkle. Valérie rose, and taking him by the lappels of his holland coat, rewarded him for his championship by a kiss on each cheek.

"Now, Jean, my lad, it's your turn," said M. Destrée, as he drew back and showed the figure of his companion: a handsome, sunburnt man of thirty, with honest brown eyes, and a mouth indicating both sweet temper and a firm will.

Valérie turned away, affecting not to hear. Jean Lemartel, nothing daunted, detained her, and kissed her cheek.

"When I am not served, I help myself," he explained.

"Quite right," approved his host, laughing, as he sat down to table, and rubbed his bald forehead with a large blue cotton handkerchief.

"And now, mother, give us our dinner. The walk from Bainville has sharpened my appetite."

"Dinner has been waiting this half-hour," returned his wife, tartly. "If everything is spoilt, it is your own fault."

"It is partly mine, madame," Jean Lemartel interposed pleasantly, as he drew a chair to Valérie's side. "I detained M. Destrée as he was passing my place, to ask his opinion upon the alterations I am making in the house. You must come too, Valérie, and tell me if you approve of them. You know for whose sake I am trying to beautify my home," he added, in a tender undertone, glancing at the pretty, clouded face at his side.

"Did you leave the books with Madame Lebrun, father?" Valérie inquired, as if her lover had not spoken.

"Ay, and found the 'Chalet' turned upside down in preparation for some grand visitors she is expecting—an English lord and his wife."

"'Visitors'? *Allez!*" Madame Destrée exclaimed, with a short laugh; "lodgers you mean. Veuve Lebrun lets her first floor during the bathing-season, though she chooses to make a mystery over it. You know that, husband."

"Well, visitors or lodgers, they are coming to-morrow; and the widow is in high feather, I can tell you. I couldn't get a word in edgeways while she was rattling on about milord and milady Del—what's-their-name?"

"Delamere," put in Valérie. "They are old friends of hers. At least, not friends exactly; but Madame Lebrun, before she married, was French governess to Lady Delamere's daughters. Madame is going to present me to her."

The hostess tossed her head. "Much good that will do you, child! Those fine folks are best at a distance."

"She wants Valérie to go to her to-morrow afternoon, and see these folks; they will have come then," remarked M. Destrée, with little tact.

"Then she may want," said his wife. "I can't spare Valérie. She is quite set up enough already without the help of Widow Lebrun's fine friends."

The girl's eyes flashed rebelliously. She turned upon Jean with an abruptness that startled him.

"I have to thank you for this, I believe. It is you who have set the mother against my friend; you would deprive me of the only amusement I have." And, throwing down her serviette, she rose from the table and left the room.

When the young farmer had recovered from his astonishment at this unexpected attack, he was about to follow her, but the host pushed him back into his chair.

"Stay where you are, lad, and eat your dinner. She will come round all the sooner, left to herself. Valérie's breezes soon blow over. As to her going sometimes to the Widow Lebrun's, I see no particular objection to it, though the fine English people may be there. One can't oppose the child's every little wish. Let's hear no more on the subject."

"Very good," said Madame, with ominous calmness. "I wash my hands of it."

While this discussion was in progress, Valérie had retreated to the garden, feeling in her angry mood as if the air indoors stifled her.

It was a large, but by no means an orderly garden that was attached to the hotel, flowers, fruit, and vegetables flourishing together in republican equality; but it had a certain picturesqueness of its own, with its tangled rose bushes, and drooping fruit-trees; its quaint hooded well, overshadowed by a weird old elder tree, and its sunny south wall, covered by a wonderful vine which was noted for producing the best grapes in the department. At the end, near the tall privet hedge which divided it from the road, was a jasmine arbour, which Valérie called her "refuge." In it she spent many a summer hour, in idleness as delightful to herself as it was exasperating to her mother.

Here Jean found her, half-an-hour later, sitting on the low rustic bench, idly picking a rose to pieces, petal by petal. She took no notice of him.

"Are you angry with me, Valérie?" he asked, as he sat down beside her, and took one of the restless little hands in his own muscular brown ones.

"I think you are very unkind, and—and interfering," she murmured, vexed to find her resentment melting away under his tender, earnest gaze. "You know how few friends I have—there is no one in this stupid place I care to associate with; and you are doing your best to divide me from the only one I value. I believe jealousy is at the bottom of it!"

"Jealousy?" he repeated, in amused inquiry. "That I am jealous of Widow Lebrun?"

"You are jealous of her influence over me, because you think it is used against yourself. That is the reason you have called her dangerous."

He pulled his beard meditatively. "That is not the only reason, Valérie, but I own that it influences me. You can't expect me to feel very kindly disposed towards a woman who is doing her best to deprive me of the dearest treasure I possess in life."

"What is that, pray?"

"Your love, sweetheart," he replied, with a warm pressure of her hand.

In spite of herself her face softened, but she only answered drily:

"You are quite sure you do possess it, then?"

"Sure? No. But until lately I hoped I did. Ay, and I hope so still, in spite of Madame Lebrun and her manœuvres. Who is she, an acquaintance of yesterday, to come between you and me? We, who have known each other all our lives? I can hardly look back to the time when I did not love you, Valérie. My affection has become a part of my life—a part of myself, and the worthiest part of me. And you? Oh, my dearest, let me hear you say that I have not deceived myself; that you do love me!"

He put his arm about her as he spoke, and drew her closer to his side, laying his bronzed cheek against hers.

"I thought you had taken that for granted, as we are supposed to be engaged," she returned, trying to speak lightly, though her voice trembled and her breath came quickly, with an emotion which was new to her. She could hardly realise that this was Jean, this ardent, pleading lover, whose tender earnestness thrilled her, in spite of herself. "My parents have given me to you——"

"I will not take you from them; I will not take you until I know that you are content to be mine," he vehemently interrupted. "Speak to me, sweetheart; let me have the assurance from your own dear lips!"

Valérie made a feeble attempt to disengage herself, and not succeeding, turned her head so that her face was hidden on his shoulder.

"I—yes, I am content," she whispered.

"And as soon as the nest is ready, you will come to me, my dove?" he softly said.

"Oh, I am in no hurry to be caged; you must leave me my liberty a little longer, Jean," she answered, drawing herself away with a little laugh.

The match for Valérie was good and suitable. Jean Lemartel was a man of substance, apart from the land he farmed, a portion of which he owned. The house belonging to it, called Les Ormes, was large and handsome, while Jean himself was of unblemished character and most genial disposition. St. Evrard thought Valérie was lucky to have been chosen by him.

II.

Madame Veuve Lebrun, the widow of a well-to-do tradesman of Lille, had been left with a comfortable independency. A plump, over-dressed, prettyish woman of seven and thirty; vain, self-indulgent, and not too scrupulous, but good-natured in her way, when it involved no trouble, and honestly fond of the innkeeper's daughter.

On the following afternoon, when Valérie arrived at the "Châlet Beauregard"—a pert little red-brick villa on the sandy new Boulevard near the sea—she found the fair châtelaine—who affected English habits, and was ridiculously pretentious—arranging a tea equipage on a gipsy table in her "boudoir."

"*A la bonne heure!*" exclaimed Madame, embracing her guest with effusion; "charmed to see you, my dear. I was afraid the 'powers that be' might not allow you to come."

"Has the Countess arrived?" Valérie asked, saying nothing of the little discordance there had been at home.

"The Countess cannot come," lamented Madame Lebrun, sinking into a chair with a tragic gesture of her plump white hands. "Picture to yourself my dismay, after all the preparations I had made!"

"But why can she not come?"

"The Earl is laid up with a sudden attack of gout, and may not be able to travel for some weeks. I received a telegram yesterday evening."

"How provoking!" the girl exclaimed, in a disappointed tone. "I did so wish to meet Lady Delamere."

The widow smiled and nodded mysteriously.

"Never mind, ma belle, you will meet someone as interesting. Who do you think arrived this morning and took me by surprise, for I had not expected him at all—Viscount Harcourt."

"Lord Delamere's son?"

"His eldest son. He is heir to the earldom and thirty thousand a-year. *Pounds!* not francs, my dear."

Valérie laughed. "How will he be able to spend it all?"

"And the most charming young man," ran on Madame, flirting her fan. "But so altered, so improved that I did not recognise him. It is true I saw but little of him when I was living with the family, but I remember him a plain, quiet, studious youth, amiable, but shy and *gauche*. He has developed into a handsome, accomplished man of the world, and—— Here he comes, I do believe!" she broke off, as a footstep sounded outside. "I asked him to take tea with me, on purpose to introduce him to you, Valérie."

Madame Lebrun rose from the sofa to receive Lord Harcourt. He was a tall, slightly-built man of six or seven and twenty, with a handsome, *blasé* face, bold blue eyes, and lips which were habitually curved in a half-cynical smile under his blonde moustache.

He sauntered into the room with his hands in his pockets, and an air of almost insolent nonchalance, which was exchanged for one of sudden interest when he saw Valérie.

"Permit me," said the widow, with her grandest air, "to present Lord Harcourt to my particular friend, Mademoiselle Destrée."

The Viscount bowed, murmuring that he was "charmed," and putting up his eye-glass, favoured the girl with a glance of undisguised admiration, which brought the colour to her cheeks.

"I was just saying," observed Madame, with an affected laugh, as she placed a chair for him, "that I find you altered past recognition, milord."

"Indeed, I hope I am!" he answered in fluent French. "Boys are generally ugly young animals, and I'm sure I was no exception to the rule. Why, how long is it, madame, since you left us?"

"Nearly ten years; though I can hardly believe it."

"Nor I, madame, when I look at you," was his polite reply, with a low bow, for he seemed to have quite the French manner. I remember you perfectly, though I was only a troublesome school-boy."

"Pardon—you were nearly seventeen, soon about to leave Eton; and you were remarkable for your steadiness and amiability."

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed laughing. "I fear I have long outgrown both those characteristics. At least, so my sisters tell me."

"A propos—how are my dear old pupils, the Ladies Maud and Hilda? You have told me nothing about them yet."

"There is not much to tell," he answered, indifferently. "You know, of course, that Maud is married?"

"Maud?" she repeated with a doubtful look. "I understood that it was Lady Hilda who married."

"Hilda, of course," he corrected hastily. "I meant Hilda. But our family histories cannot be very interesting to Mademoiselle Destrée. Suppose we change the subject?" he continued, as he rose to hand the latter her tea-cup. After which he planted himself upon an ottoman in front of her.

"Do you reside in Bainville, mademoiselle, or are you a visitor like myself?"

She glanced at him shyly under her long eyelashes.

"I live at Mont-St.-Evrard, a small town not far from here," she replied.

"Indeed? I should have taken you for a Parisienne," he remarked, looking her over with a cool and critical scrutiny which in a man of less exalted standing, Valérie would have deemed the height of impertinence. "There is nothing of the country about you—except its freshness. 'Mont-St.-Evrard' sounds picturesque. Is it a pretty place?"

"It is quaint and old-fashioned, but not otherwise interesting. There is nothing in it to attract a stranger."

"No! Yet I have a presentiment, do you know, that I shall find much to attract me," he rejoined, with an ambiguous smile, as he pulled his moustache, displaying the magnificent brilliant which sparkled on his little finger.

"If you are fond of sketching, you may," she answered, sipping her tea demurely. "The ruined Abbey of St. Evrard has often been painted."

"I shall certainly make a pilgrimage to that shrine. May I ask—a—if your house is anywhere near the Abbey?"

"No, it is in the town. We——" she coloured and hesitated. "My father keeps the Hôtel du Lion d'Or."

"But Monsieur Destrée is a landed proprietor also, and one of the wealthiest men in the district," her friend hastened to put in, detecting Lord Harcourt's involuntary look of surprise. "It is from choice not necessity that he continues the business."

"Just so; I understand," assented his lordship, and was silent a moment, looking at the girl curiously—wondering, perhaps, she thought, with a twinge of mortified pride, how an innkeeper's daughter came to look like a lady.

But there was no diminution of *empressement* in his manner; and he exerted himself to be agreeable with such success that Valérie was fairly fascinated. Never before had she tasted flattery so sweet as this young English nobleman subtly contrived to convey in every look and tone, making her vain heart beat high with triumph, and a vague, undefined sort of hope.

The afternoon fled quickly by; and when he rose, it was with the understanding that he was to return to dine with Madame that day, and spend the evening in their company.

"And now I must go and make myself presentable," he remarked. "I did not bring my man, for he is so very fine a gentleman that I feared he might put your modest household out, madame. But I am a helpless creature without him, and have managed to lose the key of my dressing-case. Does there happen to be a locksmith in the neighbourhood?"

"Certainly," Madame replied, touching the bell. "I will send for one."

When the door closed on her guest the widow dropped her company manners, and darting across the room, seized Valérie's hands, and clapped them together with a triumphant laugh.

"I knew it—I foresaw it!" she cried. "You have made a conquest. Now you need not put on that incredulous look; you know it as well as I do, *petite chatte!* Lord Harcourt is quite prepared to fall in love with you."

"Pray, dear madame, do not joke," the girl returned, yet laughing and blushing. "If you think he is likely to be in any such danger you had better tell him that—that I am engaged."

"Indeed, I shall tell him nothing of the sort," said Madame Lebrun. "I should like you to be the wife of a fine young English noble, my dear, and to be mistress of a grand château in England, where I could come and visit you. It would be utterly preposterous for a girl with your advantages to throw yourself away upon Jean Lemartel."

Valérie sighed. If Jean were but a nobleman, with a grand château and more wealth than could be counted! "I suppose," she said, quitting the subject, "that Lord Harcourt is inhabiting the apartments you prepared for his father and mother?"

"To be sure he is. They sent him to take possession that I should not be quite disappointed. It was so good of them! But, my dear," added Madame, shrewdly, "I foresee he will spend more of his time in my rooms than in his. And there is one caution I should like to give you, Valérie—do not mention at home that it is young Harcourt who has come; let them think—as of course they will think—that it is the old lord, his father. If your mother thought any young fellow was here, lord or not lord, she would stop your visits forthwith."

Three or four weeks have passed away. Summer is waning into autumn, and the rich, undulating country round St. Jean is all a sea of golden wheat. At Les Ormes, Jean Lemartel's farm, the reaping machine is already at work, and his leisure moments are few, though he rarely fails in his evening visit to the Lion d'Or.

But of late, the course of Jean's true love had run anything but smoothly. A shadow and constraint had risen up, he scarcely knew how, between himself and Valérie. Her manner was strangely capricious; sometimes cold and distant; at others unusually gentle, with a touch of deprecation, as if conscious of deserving his displeasure. He felt puzzled, doubtful, and vaguely uneasy.

One sultry afternoon Jean made his appearance at the Lion d'Or some few hours before his usual time. Red-headed Berthe, the stout, hard-working house-girl, who was seated on a bench outside the kitchen door, preparing vegetables for the soup, glanced up in surprise as he entered the courtyard.

"Is Mademoiselle at home?" he inquired.

"No, monsieur. She is spending the afternoon with Madame Lebrun."

"Again?" he exclaimed involuntarily. "Why, she was there yesterday!"

The girl glanced at him oddly under her light eyelashes.

"Shall I tell him what I know?" she debated within herself. "It would serve Mam'zelle Valérie right. Little cat! For all her superior airs, she is not above having a sweetheart on the sly; and telling things to Rose that she doesn't tell me! Yes, monsieur," she said aloud, "Mademoiselle has been invited very often since Madame's visitor arrived."

"What visitor? Oh, you mean the lodger—the old English lord."

Berthe looked up innocently. "Comment, comment, Monsieur Lemartel, you did not know? It was not the old lord who came and is staying at the châlet; it is his son, a young and handsome gentleman, and a great admirer, Rose says, of Mademoiselle."

Jean started as though he had been struck. Rose was the personal maid of Madame and Mademoiselle Destrée, having nothing to do with the service of the hotel; and it was Rose who attended her

young mistress to Madame Lebrun's and back whenever she went there; for a well brought up young French girl does not go out alone.

"A young man staying there—the son!" exclaimed Jean, his bronzed face flushing to the temples. "I think you must be in error, Berthe. Mademoiselle has not said so."

Berthe laughed quietly. "You can inquire of anybody over there, M. Jean," she said, as she rose and shook the parings from her apron. "It is the young one, sure enough, monsieur, and he is over head and ears in love with our demoiselle. He will inherit a sumptuous palace in England, and millions and millions of francs a year!"

Jean believed her. He felt instinctively that it was true, and that this was the explanation of the change in Valérie which had so perplexed him.

Losing not a minute, he turned away, and sought the train for Bainville, his heart burning with anger, and sick with jealous pain.

The Bainville season was now at its height, and the bright, breezy little watering-place was overflowing with visitors. On this particular afternoon, the gardens of the casino were thronged with a gaily-dressed crowd, promenading to the sound of a band, which was vigorously attacking the Overture to Zampa. Among the groups seated under the glass-roofed verandah in front of the building were Madame Lebrun and Valérie.

The girl looked languid and listless, and her eyes wandered absently over the crowd, as if her thoughts were elsewhere. Her companion was fluttering her fan, and glancing restlessly towards the entrance gate.

"How provoking it is!" she muttered at last. "The concert will be over before the Vicomte joins us—thanks to that tiresome friend of his, that vulgar Mr. Lester. I wonder how he can tolerate the familiarity of the man. Here he comes at last, and Lester, of course, with him still!"

Mr. Lester, a friend of Lord Harcourt's, had arrived at Bainville the previous evening; he was a stout, common-looking man of forty, whose fashionably cut clothes seemed to sit uneasily on his clumsy figure.

The two men formed a curious contrast as they advanced slowly up the broad carriage drive leading to the casino, Mr. Lester talking earnestly, while his companion listened with unconcealed impatience. At the foot of the verandah steps the Viscount paused.

"I have given you my answer," he said brusquely. "You are wasting breath in saying more."

"And, after what I have told you, you persist in staying?"

"Over to-day, yes. What difference can twenty-four hours make?"

"All the difference between safety and ——"

"Hold your tongue!" the young man broke in, hurriedly glancing over his shoulder. "Do you want all the world to hear?"

The other made an impatient movement. "Well, I say no more.

Have your own way—and take the consequences," he retorted, and with a surly nod, he turned on his heel.

The Viscount shrugged his shoulders, and ran lightly up the steps to where Valérie and her chaperon were sitting.

"I beg pardon for being so late, but I've been occupied. Lester has brought me bad news," he continued, as he drew a chair to Valérie's side. "At least, it is bad to me, for it compels me to return to England to-morrow."

"What do you say, milord?" the widow exclaimed, bending forward to look at him. "You are going to-morrow? But what has happened? Is Lord Delamere worse?"

"Oh, no, it has nothing to do with——with my father; it is a matter of business which would not interest you."

"But when it is settled you will return, I hope?"

"Oh, of course; though I don't know when—it depends," he answered. "Will you take a turn with me in the grounds?" he presently said in a lower tone to Valérie.

She hesitated; struck with a sudden shyness and reluctance to be alone with him. "I fear there is not time," she objected; "the concert is almost over, and I must be going home."

"There is plenty of time. It may be our last walk together," he whispered. "Come."

"Go, Valérie—don't be childish," said Madame Lebrun, graciously, believing in her own mind that the young lord was going to propose. Thus adjured, the girl rose, and they descended the steps into the garden.

Had she been less preoccupied, she would have noticed a familiar figure which emerged from one of the side paths as they passed—Jean Lemartel. He stood for a moment as if stunned, gazing after them with a dark look of suppressed passion on his face, which altered it strangely. Then, taking a sudden resolution, he turned, and slowly followed them.

Meantime, Valérie's companion had led her to the terrace by the sea, which was comparatively deserted, and as they paced slowly along, he was speaking in an earnest undertone, without his usual drawl.

"You must know that I love you, Valérie—that I have loved you from the first moment I saw you!" began Lord Harcourt. "I have struggled with the feeling, knowing what opposition I should meet with from my family; but—but I find I can't live without you. Even the idea of a short separation makes me wretched. But, my sweet Valérie—if you love me we need not be separated even for a day. I will take you with me when I go to-morrow."

She drew her hand, which he had taken, from him, stepping back in surprise.

"Take me with you, Lord Harcourt! What do you mean?"

"I mean that we can do what many a couple, situated as we are,

have done before us—get married quietly at a registrar's, and save a world of fuss and trouble. Of course my people will be vexed at first; but when once the knot is tied they can only receive you, and you will take your proper position in society as my wife, and—as—as—the future Countess of Delamere, for I fear my poor father cannot be here long. Say that you consent, my darling—that you will come with me!"

They reached the end of the terrace as he spoke. He put her hand within his arm as they stood, pressing it to his side.

Valérie's heart beat fast, and her colour came and went. Her ambitious dreams were realised; the prize she had longed for, wealth, station, lay in her grasp. How was it that it seemed all at once to have lost its value, like the fairy gold which turns to dead leaves in the hand?

He watched her face keenly in the silence; but she did not speak.

"Don't keep me in suspense," he pleaded, bending towards her, as she stood, with one hand on the low railing, gazing absently at the sunlit sea. "Say that you will come!"

She drew a deep breath and looked at him. For the first time it struck her that there was something hard and cruel in the handsome face; a treacherous light in the cold blue eyes.

"It is so sudden," she faltered. "Why could we not wait until you return?"

"How do I know that I should find you in the same mind? '*Souvent femme varie!*' No, it must be now or never."

"Then it will be never," Valérie replied with decision, "for I certainly shall not consent to anything so disreputable as a runaway marriage. What would my father and mother feel? What would the world say of me ——"

"Bah! who cares what the world says?" he broke in, sharply. "Pardon my impatience, Valérie; if you loved me, you would not give that a moment's consideration."

"Perhaps I should not," she answered quietly; "but as it is I do."

He was evidently surprised. Biting his lip, he gave her a look which startled her.

"Thank you; that is explicit," he said, with a short angry laugh. "Then I am to conclude that you have drawn me on to a declaration merely for the pleasure of refusing me?"

"I have not drawn you on," she said indignantly.

"Of course not!" he cried, with a disagreeable sneer.

"But I have not," she said.

"Of course not!" repeated he, in the same tone. "You and your friend did not speculate upon me from the first, did you? Though, as I have since learnt, you were not quite at liberty to do so, being engaged to another man. I wonder, by the way, if Corydon is aware how you have been amusing yourself lately? It might almost be a charity to tell him."

"It is unnecessary; he has heard already," said a voice behind them, and turning, with a start, Valérie found herself face to face with Jean Lemartel.

The colour rushed to her cheeks, then receded, leaving them white and ghastly. After one swift, terrified glance at him, she drooped her head with a burning sense of humiliation.

My lord put up his eye-glass, and surveyed the intruder with a supercilious stare.

"Is this—a—gentleman—a friend of yours, mademoiselle?" he drawled.

"My name is Lemartel, and I am—or was—Mademoiselle Destrée's *fiancé*," Jean replied, some menace in the studied calmness of his tone.

"Corydon himself, by Jove!" muttered the Englishman, with a suppressed laugh. "Charmed to make your acquaintance, monsieur," he said aloud. "We ought to be friends, as we are companions in misfortune. This cruel little beauty has been playing fast and loose with us both, it seems."

"I decline to discuss Mademoiselle Destrée's conduct with you," Lemartel rejoined; "but I will tell you my opinion of your own, if you choose. Whatever your rank may be by the accident of birth, your actions are those of a scoundrel."

An ugly oath escaped the other, and he lifted his cane threateningly. Before it could descend, Jean wrested it from his hand, broke it in two, and tossed it over the fence. Then, seizing Lord Harcourt's wrist in a grasp of iron, he lowered his voice, so as to be inaudible to Valérie.

"Who but an unmitigated scoundrel would seek to entrap an innocent girl to ruin by such a proposal as I overheard just now? You know well enough that a marriage so contracted by a French girl would not be legal either in France or England! You could shake off the tie when you pleased—and you know this, I say. What is your defence?"

"I shall not condescend to defend myself to you. Take your hand from my wrist, sir, and let me go."

For a moment Jean kept his hold, looking down at him with so dangerous a glitter in his eyes that the man cowered, and Valérie uttered a faint cry of alarm. Jean looked at her; and with a gesture of angry contempt, flung his rival aside.

"Go, then; and if you are wise, keep out of my path in future—and out of Mademoiselle Destrée's. I have no right now to control your actions," he added gravely, turning to Valérie, "but I must ask what you are going to do. You cannot remain in the company of this man."

"I was going home," the girl faltered. "Rose is on the bench at the gate, waiting for me. Please make my excuses to Madame Lebrun," she added, addressing her late companion. "Adieu, monsieur!"

As if not caring to trust her, Jean walked by her side towards the gate. Milord looked after them with a smile which made his face sinister.

"Not 'adieu,' little jilt, but 'au revoir,'" he muttered. "I swear I will win you yet, if it be only to punish you for this. *Nous verrons!*"

Valérie's heart beat fast when she was alone with her lover, and for a moment she had not courage to speak.

"Jean," she began at last, glancing timidly at his pale, stern face, "I know that you are very angry with me, and that I have deserved your anger; but——"

"I am not angry," he interrupted, with a cold composure which took her by surprise. "A false and fickle woman is not worth an honest man's anger or regret."

The colour rushed to her face. "Indeed, I have not been false to you," she protested. "I have done wrong in suppressing the truth at home about M. Harcourt, and in letting him pay attention to me, but I never really cared for him—and I refused him just now as you must have heard."

"Yes, I heard; I heard all," said Jean, with a bitter smile. "I know that while I was living in a fool's paradise of love and hope, you were amusing yourself with this fine gentleman; laughing, no doubt, together, you and he, at the simple lover who believed in you so blindly."

"No, no, Jean," the girl exclaimed; "I never mentioned you to him in my life. Deceitful I have been; fickle, if you will; but in my heart I have not ceased to—to love and respect you, and I have learned of late to value your affection as I never did before."

"We often learn the worth of a thing for the first time when we lose it," he commented, coldly.

"Do you mean that—that I have lost your love for ever?" Valérie faltered, pausing, and looking at him in forlorn appeal.

"You have lost my trust," was his grave reply; "and without perfect confidence love cannot exist."

"And you can renounce me calmly—coldly, without a pang?" the girl exclaimed.

"Without a pang?" he echoed, and his broad chest heaved with a tearless sob; "may you never feel such pain as it costs me. But we must part. I dare not trust the honour and happiness of my life in your keeping. Friends we may still be, if you will, but lovers nevermore."

The girl's heart contracted with a spasm which was like physical pain to her. A wave of bitterest regret and self-reproach swept over her, then subsided, leaving her with a reckless feeling of indifference to everything.

"If I am not worthy of your love, I am equally unworthy of your

friendship," she responded, in an altered voice. "Henceforth we will be strangers. Here is your ring."

She drew it from her finger as she spoke, but instead of handing it to him, she, with a sudden passionate movement, flung it into the advancing waves. Then, joining Rose, she walked quickly with her to the railway station.

"The weather is changing, there will be rain before night," remarked Madame Destrée about five o'clock on the following evening, as she glanced from the stocking she was mending to the darkening sky.

"Ay, it looks like it," rejoined her husband, laying down the *France du Nord;* "and Jean will be caught in it. I met him this afternoon starting off to Samer on foot, by the 'old road.' He seemed out of spirits; he and Valérie have been having a tiff, I expect. Where is Valérie?"

"Lying down. She complained of a headache—overtired herself yesterday at Bainville, of course!"

Madame's tone was tart, and the innkeeper rubbed his bald forehead with a thoughtful frown. "Don't you think, wife," he said, "that she has gone a little bit too much to Bainville lately?"

"*I* think!" retorted Madame. "If she goes and takes up her bed and board there, it's no business of mine. You took that out of my hands, you know."

"The girl has not seemed like herself," he said mildly. "Go up to her, mère; see if she won't come down."

Madame deliberately finished the thin place she was darning before moving to comply. She was away a few minutes; when she returned there was a white look on her face which startled M. Destrée.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "Is the child ill?"

Madame shook her head, and carefully closed the door before replying.

"It is very strange," she said, lowering her voice. "Valérie is not in the house; and—and—Berthe has been telling me a tale."

Berthe had a crooked kind of temper. It chanced that Rose had had a holiday given her that day, which Berthe resented. It was not long since Rose had a holiday before, while she—Berthe—had not been given one for ages and ages. Besides this, Berthe thought it might be unwise to keep silence any longer upon what she knew, and she opened her mind to her mistress.

About half-an-hour before Madame Destrée went upstairs to her daughter's room, Berthe had seen Mademoiselle Valérie go quietly out at the side door, a small black travelling bag in her hand. Berthe, going up presently, found Mademoiselle's bedroom in disorder, and part of a torn letter and envelope lying on the floor.

"Berthe tells me it was brought here this morning by a boy," related Madame Destrée to her husband, as she put the letter into his hand. "The boy said he was to wait for an answer, but Valérie

sent word down that her answer was merely 'Yes.' Read it, Jacques."

He took it from his wife, mechanically, looking at her in a bewildered manner, carried it to the window, and read it aloud. The fragment began abruptly in the middle of a sentence.

"—— but in spite of your cruelty, I love you more madly than ever, and am determined not to give you up. My proposal yesterday scandalised you, but perhaps you will view it in another light if I tell you that Madame Lebrun approves the plan, and offers to accompany us, to play propriety. We shall wait for you in a closed carriage at the Abbey ruins this evening, at six o'clock. In a very few hours we shall be in London, and by mid-day to-morrow you will be my wife. Send a word by the bearer—yes or no, and let it be 'Yes,' my queen.

"Your devoted
"HARCOURT."

The innkeeper turned towards his wife, his face blank with consternation.

"What in heaven's name does this mean?" he cried.

"It means," she answered, with angry emphasis, "that Valérie has disgraced us by an elopement—English fashion. You have only yourself to thank for it, Jacques."

"But who is the man?" asked the unhappy father.

"Ah! Berthe has told me. It is all of a piece, husband, and Valérie has been as deceitful as the rest. It was not the old lord who came to stay at the Châlet Beauregard, but his son, the young lord, and he has been making love to Valérie all these weeks. Her precious friend, Madame Lebrun, has led her into this entanglement!"

Jacques Destrée crushed the letter in his hand, with the first oath his wife had ever heard from his lips.

"She shall answer for it," he said, hoarsely, "and so shall this man, were he fifty times a lord, if my child comes to harm. But it is not too late to stop them. I can reach the Abbey before——"

He was interrupted by the sound of wheels in the courtyard, and an open carriage drew up at the door. The first person who alighted was Madame Lebrun. She was followed by an agent de police in uniform, and a stranger of semi-clerical appearance, evidently English; a tall, wiry man, whose clean-shaven face would have been singularly expressionless but for a pair of keen, observant grey eyes, which seemed to "make a note" of everything they rested on.

Brushing past Berthe, who had came forward, the widow burst into the sitting-room, dishevelled with haste and agitation.

"Monsieur Destrée—such a terrible thing has happened," she began. "Ah, madame! I am almost out of my senses. To think that I should have been so deceived. Even now I can hardly believe it."

The French policeman stepped forward.

"Allow me to explain to monsieur," he interposed. "My English colleague here——"

"Inspector Bennett, of Scotland Yard, at your service," put in the latter, blandly.

"Is charged with a warrant for the arrest of *le nommé* Francis Walton, alias Marquis de la Roche, alias Viscount Harcourt, an accomplished swindler and *chevalier d'industrie*, who has been 'wanted' by the police for some time back for various clever frauds. His latest exploit was to rob a young English nobleman, son of Lord Delamere, to whom he had contrived to get introduced in Paris as a Frenchman of distinction. He wormed himself into Lord Harcourt's confidence, acquiring an intimate knowledge of all his family affairs; and when the scent after him got too hot in Paris, he decamped with his lordship's desk, containing some money and a little jewellery, and——"

"And came straight off to me, passing himself off as Lord Harcourt," impatiently interrupted the widow, who was boiling over with her wrongs. "He thought rightly that my house was the last place where the police would look for him, and he has been living at my expense all the while, the coquin—*Va!*"

"We should have nailed him to-day though," said the English officer, "but that a confederate of his got scent of his danger and came on to warn him. Walton has given us the slip for the moment, but we imagine that your daughter, monsieur, may hold a clue to his whereabouts."

"He wrote to Valérie this morning," the widow explained, "and I thought perhaps—where is she?" she broke off, looking round.

"Where is she?" the innkeeper echoed in a tone which startled her; "that is the question I must ask you, madame. What have you done with my daughter?"

She looked at him in astonishment.

"I—Monsieur Destrée? I don't understand you," she exclaimed. Then as a sudden light flashed upon her: "Don't tell me," she gasped, "that she is gone away with that villain!"

"Why should we tell you what you know already?" sharply spoke Madame Destrée. "You were in his confidence—the elopement was of your planning. Read his letter, and deny it if you can."

The widow glanced over it, and contemptuously tossed the paper aside.

"It is false," she said, indignantly. "I did not even know that he had proposed a clandestine marriage. I should never, never have countenanced it. It is true that I encouraged his attentions; I own to that; I thought it would be such a grand match for Valérie; and yesterday evening, when he told me she had refused him, I felt greatly vexed. My poor, pretty Valérie."

But police officers, whether French or English, know better than to waste time in sentiment. Accompanied by the innkeeper, they got into the waiting carriage, and were driven away at a gallop. The torn note had given them a clue as to the possible hiding-place of Walton.

The ruined Abbey of St. Evrard, with its crumbling ivy-mantled walls, crowned the summit of the hill on which the town was built. It was approached by what was known—in contradistinction to a more convenient route lately constructed—as the "old road," which wound up the steep hillside, and skirting the ruin, dipped abruptly into the wooded valley beyond.

Except by visitors to the Abbey, this road was seldom used, and was already becoming grass-grown and neglected. It looked particularly gloomy in the thickening dusk of this rainy evening. No living creatures were in sight, except the sheep which cropped the short herbage at the foot of the ruin, and a solitary woman's figure, leaning on the low stone wall which enclosed it. It was Valérie—first at the trysting-place.

The girl's face was white and troubled, and her eyes looked out wistfully at the wide darkening landscape beneath her, as if they were gazing into the mist and shadow of her own future.

What would that future be? Until now she had not allowed herself to reflect on what she was doing; yielding to a blind impulse of resentment and wounded pride; but now that question rose up before her, and struck chill to her heart. She knew that she neither loved nor respected the man in whose power she was about to place herself. He could give her, she supposed, all that she had been lately thinking most desirable—rank, riches, and power; but would these compensate for what she was relinquishing—the home she had left, and the love she had lost?

Suddenly a light dog-cart came in sight, rapidly mounting the hill towards the Abbey. Valérie moved towards the flight of worn stone steps giving entrance to the enclosure (which was above the level of the road), and looked doubtfully at the advancing vehicle.

At first she did not recognise the driver, who was muffled in an ulster, with his hat pulled low over his eyes; but when he drew rein at the foot of the steps, she saw that it was Lord Harcourt—alone. He looked up and called to her, but seeing that she did not stir, shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and, after glancing up and down the lonely road, ascended the steps to her side.

"I beg a hundred pardons for keeping you waiting, my dearest, but I was detained at the last moment," he began, hurriedly. He was flushed, and looked anxious and excited. "Come, we have not a moment to lose."

Valérie drew back. "Where is Madame Lebrun?" she asked.

"Madame did not care to come, as it threatened rain; she will meet us at the Embarcadère," he answered, without looking at her.

There was something in his tone and manner which inspired her with sudden distrust.

"I believe you are deceiving me," she said, gazing at him searchingly.

"Believe what you like, only come," he returned, lightly. "We have a good hour's drive before us, and the boat starts at seven."

"If you can deceive me in one thing you may in another; I shall not trust myself to you," was her reply. "I feel sure Madame Lebrun never agreed to come."

His face darkened. "And you think I shall let you slip through my fingers like that? No, my beauty; I have won you and I mean to keep you."

"Not by force," she retorted, as he laid his hand on her wrist.

"Come, Valérie, don't be foolish," he expostulated. "I deceived you about Madame, I confess, but all's fair in love and war. It was a harmless fiction to quiet your scruples; we shall get on much better without her. Come, it is only the first step which costs. When once we are fairly started you will thank me for insisting."

He threw his arm round her to draw her down the steps; but Valérie, thoroughly roused now, resisted with all her might. "I will not—I will not!" she cried passionately. "Let me go home—let me go back to——"

"To your rustic swain," he put in, with an angry laugh. "That you shall not, my girl, or I shall still be in his debt for yesterday's business. Little fool! do you know what you are refusing? Think what I can give you."

"You can give me nothing that will compensate for what I have lost through you," she returned. "I deserve to be called a fool for ever having listened to you, but I have come to my senses now."

"A little too late," he sneered, and fairly lifting her from her feet, in spite of her struggles, he carried her down the steps.

"Coward—coward!" she panted. "Ah, you would not dare if—if Jean were here! Jean—help, help!"

She uttered the name almost unconsciously, with no hope that her appeal would be heard. But it had hardly left her lips when there was an answering shout from the turn of the road; a sound of hurried footsteps, and before she could realise what had happened, she was in Jean Lemartel's arms, while his rival measured his length on the ground.

The latter staggered to his feet, bewildered by the sudden attack. Then, recognising his assailant, he uttered a savage oath, and slipped his hand into the breast of his coat.

Confused and excited as she was, Valérie noticed the movement, and saw that Jean was in danger. With a cry that rang shrilly through the evening stillness, she flung herself between the two men, and received in her own shoulder the shot which was intended for her lover. Jean caught her as she was falling.

"Stand back—don't touch her!" he said hoarsely, as the Englishman, who looked genuinely dismayed at the mishap, approached to assist him. At that moment, the carriage containing Monsieur Destrée and the two policemen came galloping into sight. Walton at once comprehended the peril he was in, and hurriedly made for the dog-cart.

The men shouted, and called "Stop him! Stop him!" and Jean, laying the fainting girl gently on the grass by the roadside, sprang forward and caught the reins as the other mounted. Walton lashed at him furiously with the whip, while the frightened horse reared and plunged, but Lemartel kept his hold until the carriage dashed up, and its occupants came to his assistance. A short, sharp scuffle, when Walton was overpowered, and had handcuffs put on his wrists.

"Sorry to interfere with your little plans, my Lord Viscount," said the detective drily, "but I fear your pleasure trip must be deferred—at any rate for the present. By-and-by you may perhaps get change of air and scene at Government expense."

"But what is all this?" gasped the innkeeper, as he now saw Valérie.

Jean Lemartel explained: Valérie had received the shot which was meant for him.

Showing signs of returning consciousness, she was carefully lifted into the carriage by her father and Jean. The officers drove off in the dog-cart with their prisoner, to convey him into the safe keeping of that justice at whose hands he would assuredly get his deserts.

Valérie's wound proved more serious than was at first supposed, and it was many weeks before she was able to leave her bed, and be about again. Nothing could conquer her languor and depression, and she shrank nervously from visitors. Not a day passed without Jean's calling at the inn to inquire after her. His manner to her was invariably gentle, but its reserve and constraint seemed to augment the gulf between them.

She knew that it could not be otherwise; but, all the same, her heart rebelled passionately against the change, and she felt as if she would give half her life to regain the faithful heart she had so lightly thrown away.

One day she sat in her favourite jasmine bower, now withered and forlorn. The autumn morning was mild as spring, but grey and melancholy, with that hushed and pensive stillness in the air, which seems like Nature's mood of calm regret for the year's decay.

Valérie was sitting with her hands listlessly clasped on the rustic table before her, when the garden gate swung to, and Jean came slowly down the path. She did not see him till he was close to her; then she started and half rose, as if her first impulse were to fly.

He paused in the arched entrance of the arbour, his dark eyes

dwelling earnestly on her face. "Why do you avoid me, Valérie?" he asked gravely. "Are you afraid of me?"

She made no answer, but with a constrained smile, sank on to the bench again.

Jean took his seat at her side. "You need not fear that I shall touch upon unwelcome topics," he said. "The past is dead and buried so far as I am concerned—except one fact which I do not wish to forget; that you saved my life at the risk of your own."

She shook her head. "But for me you would never have been in danger. Oh, Jean," she faltered, laying her hand on his arm, "you do not know what I have suffered during my illness—the pain and remorse I have felt! I cannot expect to regain your—your—what I lost—but let me know that I have your forgiveness; that you can think of me without bitterness."

Jean took the little pleading hand in both his own, looking at her with a serious smile.

"There is no room in my heart for resentment, Valérie. It is full to the brim of—love."

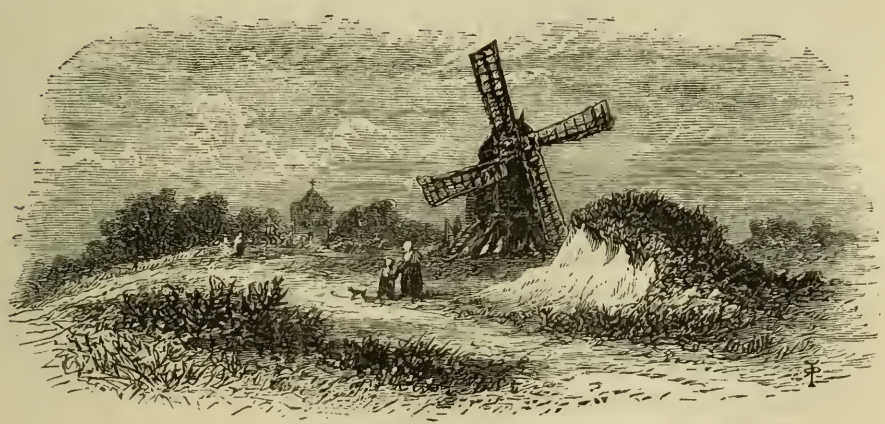
She started, raising her eyes with an incredulous look.

"In spite of everything, I love you. Love is a plant of obstinate growth, my dear, not easily destroyed when once it has taken firm root."

"But—I—can't believe it, Jean."

"Then the sooner I prove it to you, the better," he whispered tenderly. "My darling, how soon will you be my wife?"

With a sigh of sweet contentment, Valérie allowed herself to be drawn into those protecting arms; and all the troubles of the past were effaced as he kissed away her shower of happy tears.



SWEET SUMMER.

THE spring has fled with its shine and shower,
And summer reigns, in the radiant hour
When noon burns sweetness from every flower
That turns its face to the sun.
She reigns in the waning blue of the skies,
When the level light of late evening lies
On pastures golden with memories
Of dear dreams, over and done.

O summer, splendid crown of the year,
Beyond faint spring and wan autumn dear,
Hope and remembrance are all they bear,
But joy is the soul of thee—
A soul that stirs in the unripe corn,
In the dewy hush of the new sweet morn,
When in leafy woods soft echoes are born
Of the far-off song of the sea.

O summer, sweet summer, when lovers stray
Past the green mill-pool by the shady way,
Through the fields soft-wreathed in the new-mown hay,
And down through the leafy lane;
When the young dream dreams, and the old folks stand
And look out over the quiet land,
And sigh (not sadly, if hand clasps hand)
That youth comes never again!

For the summer dies—as our youth must die—
And vain are the prayer and the passionate cry,
The roses and beautiful days go by
With all their wonder and worth;
And snows are over the lily's head,
And a sheet of ice on the rose's bed,
And love may die, now the leaves are dead
And winter is lord of the earth.

Yet listen, sad heart, to the glad refrain
Of the brown-winged birds in the brown-hedged lane;
Summer has gone, but she comes again!
Sweet summer never can die.
And youth, sweet youth, is immortal, too,
And will bloom again as the roses do,
And love is eternal—if hearts be true—
Though youth and the rose go by.

E. NESBIT.

AS I HURRIED THROUGH THE BALL-ROOM ON MY WAY HOMEWARDS, I SAW THEM SEATED AWAY FROM THE CROWD, ON A SOFA IN THE CONSERVATORY, LOOKING AS CALM AS IF THAT PASSIONATE EPISODE ON THE BALCONY HAD BEEN ONLY A DREAM OF MY DISORDERED IMAGINATION.

THE

SUMMER NUMBER

OF

THE ARGOSY.

ANTIPATHY.

A Confession.

I.

"Within your morbid breast spring many masters."

IF anyone, reading the following true and strange history of my life and love, should wonder what constrained me to write it, I would tell him that I was irresistibly driven to it for two reasons. One, that I might leave a warning; the other, that I might, perhaps, make some justification for actions that, as I well know, admit of no justification in the eyes of man.

But firstly, and chiefly, I write as a warning to all young and ardent natures, that, at the outset of life, yield themselves to morbid and hysterical fancies of the imagination; until by excessive homage they corrupt what might have been a temperate and kindly friend into a cruel despot; whose iron chains eat like poison into the very soul.

I, Geoffrey Malison, am the son of an energetic and well-to-do lawyer, and of his wife, a beautiful and accomplished woman, with strong literary tastes of the semi-heroic, semi-sentimental style which was the fashion of the day. I had two sisters, one older, the other younger than myself; and it was on these two girls that my parents lavished most of their affection.

They were both pretty; the elder, in fact, beautiful; and the younger full of a sprightly vivacity that captivated all strangers; and this was enough to win the affection of my mother, who had a shrinking dislike to all ugly and awkward things.

It was my misfortune to be an ugly and awkward boy.

I had no talents to show off before the partly-fashionable, partly-literary society that gathered round my mother. When Mildred and Hilda, in their white frocks and coloured sashes, with their pretty manners and childish accomplishments, ran about freely and were

made much of by the company, I used to sit alone in a corner, a book smuggled under my jacket, and my eyes staring from under my rough black hair at the "affected sillies," as I called them contemptuously, who thought themselves so much my superiors.

In spite of this boyish scorn, which was merely on the surface, I formed numberless attachments from my point of vantage, both to men and women; and if any of them spoke or nodded to me, I was as proud as a turkey-cock for a week afterwards; though, at the time, I probably, from diffidence and shyness, returned their civility by a scowl.

But, much as I admired some of these fine ladies and gentlemen, there was not one of them whom I considered fit to tie the shoes of my own mother. To me, she was the loveliest and wittiest woman that ever trod the earth; and there was a vague knowledge within me that, if only she would take the trouble to look for it, she would find more sympathy, more *kindredness* in my ugly little self than she could ever discover in my pretty and elegant sisters.

I shall never forget the first time we, as it were, made friends—if one may use that expression in relation to mother and son.

I was about thirteen, and had come home from school for my summer holidays. My father was grouse-shooting in Scotland, my eldest sister had just married, and Hilda was paying a long visit to some juvenile friend. So that, for once, my mother and I were left tête-à-tête in the little country house to which we always resorted in the summer.

At first she was very much bored; I could see that, though she imagined she concealed it from me. And I believe she thought I was as dull and lonely as herself, for one day, when we were sitting in the garden, she suddenly said:

"These are dull holidays for you, Geoff. Would you like a school-friend to stay with you for a little while?"

"No, thank you," I said, rousing up from a reverie over my book. "I am having a jolly enough holiday."

"That's a good, contented boy. But you must not be alone all the time. I have a good mind to send for that naughty little Hilda to cheer us up. You could play about together."

"No—please, please don't." I exclaimed eagerly. "You see—you see, mother—Hilda is always afraid of spoiling her frocks. She is a little girl, you know. I am much, much happier without her. *Please* don't send for her."

"Why, my dear boy, don't excite yourself. It was only for your sake I suggested it, and if you object, well and good. Do you like being alone, then, you strange boy?"

"Yes," I said. Then I flung down my book, and stood up before her, scowling horribly, I believe; as fierce and wild as a savage—at least so she told me afterwards.

"I like being alone with you," I said boldly, my little heart bursting with admiration. "So there! And when the girls are here

you never talk to me alone, and I can't sit alone with you and look at you, when they are hanging round with their doll-faces. They only care about clothes and sashes and trumpery ; but I like poetry and books, as you do, only you don't know it, and you think I am a fool. There ! "

Having relieved my feelings by this outburst, I quietly resumed my seat, and pored over my book again, half frightened by my audacity. For a little while there was silence ; then my mother burst into a peal of laughter.

" Come here," she said. " So you are fond of me, are you, you strange little fellow ? And you, like poetry—you, with your gloomy face ? Well, come here and give me a kiss, and tell me what you are reading about."

By the time Hilda came home after a month's absence, she found herself no longer reigning supreme over my mother's affections. She was still the spoilt pet ; but I was the *friend.* It was to me my mother turned when she was interested in some new book or work of art. It was to me she turned for sympathy when my father's gravity and Hilda's frivolity palled upon her.

Thus, as I grew up, it was she who fostered the romantic side of my character, encouraging me to give free licence to the unbridled imagination with which nature had burdened me—for in time it became a burden, instead of a gift, such as, under wiser hands, it ought to have been. By the time I was sixteen, instead of taking things as they came, in boyish, happy-go-lucky fashion, I had already begun a half morbid analysis of the *cause* of things ; of my own and of other people's actions ; and of my own inestimable feelings. I liked to think I was more interesting than other boys—" a character"—a kind of modified Shelley, with a taste for the high-flown and supernatural.

Luckily there was a saving influence at work that provided me with a certain amount of vigour and common sense. This was my father's stern, uncompromising character, which was probably inherited, in some degree, by all his children, and his active contempt for what he termed " women's sentiment." He was a man of violent temper, and was more feared than loved by us, though I had a curious respect for him on account of this very temper, which I could sympathise with from personal experience. When he caned me, or thundered out passionate invectives for some boyish delinquency, I trembled and admired. For, when I was in a rage myself, did not I *long* to have a son to flog, or to curse—something tangible upon which to vent myself ?

" You will grow up a confounded prig, with your fads," he used to tell me. " And your mother is fool enough to encourage you."

I think it was Hilda who generally drew down his wrath upon me. She did not understand or care for me, and I happened to have one or two " fads " that especially provoked her. One was a curious prejudice I had against one or two people—a prejudice so unreasoning

and yet so intense, that it is no wonder she imagined it to be a kind of silly affectation.

From earliest childhood I have been very strong in my likes and dislikes. I do not mean that I disliked readily or often, or that, as a rule, my affections were different from those of most sensitive children. But there were one or two exceptional cases that seemed to rouse a most curious antipathy in my very soul. It was not hate; that is to say, I felt no particular ill-will for the person concerned; it was simply antipathy; a kind of repellant horror that even made itself felt the moment the object entered the room, though I might not see or know that he was there. It was very like the uncanny, nervous feeling experienced by some people if a cat is anywhere near, and I could no more reason or fight against my peculiarity than they can.

It used to annoy my father intensely when I was a little boy, unable to hide my feelings, and, therefore, extravagantly abusive of anyone to whom I happened to take this dislike. I remember his flogging me and sending me aching to bed, because I called his maiden sister, my Aunt Matilda, "An old beast, whom I hoped would be shut out of heaven!" and I have no doubt I richly deserved the punishment.

As I grew older, the cane was discarded as unsuited to the dignity of my years; but I recollect one occasion in particular when my father remonstrated very seriously with me on the subject.

I was about eighteen; it was my first term at Oxford, and I had run up to town for one or two nights for the 'Varsity match. We had a carriage at Lord's, where my mother and Hilda entertained their friends, and most of the day passed pleasantly, Hilda and her girl-companions being enough to keep any party from tedium.

But towards the middle of the afternoon I began to feel uneasy and depressed. An uncomfortable sensation came over me, impossible to describe, but which I recognised at once as that peculiar sensitiveness which always made known to me the presence of some person I did not like. I looked round the carriage to see if any of my pet aversions were present—very likely my Aunt Matilda, with her cruel lips and green eyes. But no. I saw no one to whom I could ascribe the disagreeable sensation. There was evidently a new influence working on me. Strangely enough all present were people I knew and liked—all except a little girl, a new friend of Hilda's, who had just come into the carriage. She was not more than fourteen, and one of the prettiest, daintiest little creatures I have ever seen; a child's face, with innocent blue eyes and merry lips, and nothing in her outward appearance that could do otherwise than attract.

Yet, strange to say, I no sooner looked at her, than I understood that in this inoffensive child was an influence that repelled me. In fact, I had never before experienced the feeling with such acuteness. I felt chilled, depressed and irritable; so much so that I presently left the carriage, and did not rejoin the rest of my family until it was

time to drive home, and I had seen an affectionate parting take place between Hilda and the little stranger.

"I do love Eva," Hilda exclaimed, after we had passed out of range of signs and blown kisses. "I like her better than Nelly, and she is to be my best friend now. She says so too."

"Who is she?" I asked. "What an odious child."

"My dear boy—she is an angel," cried my mother. "Such a sweet little thing. She is Eva Fane, daughter of my old friend."

"She struck me as full of airs and graces. However, I daresay she is charming, if you say so. Personally, I detest her—she gives me the creeps."

"Ah! one of your unreasonable antipathies. But really, this case is rather too much, Geoffrey. She is only a child. Wait till you know her."

"My first instincts are never changed," I said. "And as for her being a child, that makes no difference. Her nature and character are there, just the same as they will be ten years hence, only not matured. Anyhow, I can't help my feelings, and I *do* dislike her, thoroughly."

"You are very stupid, and very unkind," put in Hilda, tearfully. "I won't hear by best friend abused. And she is coming to spend the evening with us—so there! And we were both coming down to dinner for a treat, because you are here—and now it won't be a treat. You will be cross and snappy—*I* know."

"Not to you, goosey. And if I am, I'll do penance to-morrow by taking you out shopping, and buying you a present. Is that a bargain?"

Like most women, Hilda was easily bribed into forgiveness of the insult paid to her "best friend," and a truce was signed.

I fully intended to conceal my feelings at dinner by simply ignoring the angelic Eva, when she made her appearance. But circumstances were against me. She not only sat next to me, but kept prattling away with a most artless ignorance of my indifference and superiority. For one thing, I was a grown-up young man, and did not care for little girls; and for another, her proximity was positively painful to me, agitating me in a wholly unaccountable way, which half awed, half mystified me. I began to feel angry, ashamed of myself. But the more I fought against my dislike, the stronger it became, until I was absolutely rude and unkind to the child. I could not help it. I was longing to escape; praying every instant that her governess would fetch her, or that Hilda would take her out of sight to her schoolroom. How they dawdled over dessert, toying with their fruit, and laughing like babies over the crackers and mottoes.

"Won't you pull one with me?" asked my little neighbour, touching me on the arm with childlike familiarity. "Why do you look so gloomy? See! Here is a beauty! Catch hold! Now—*pull*—

perhaps there'll be a fool's-cap inside for you." And she burst into a ripple of laughter.

"Shut up! don't touch me! your fingers are covered with juice," I exclaimed roughly, shaking off her touch with a sudden horror that I could not restrain. "No, I don't want to pull crackers. It is some of Hilda's fool-play, and only fit for babies." Then, as she again, partly by accident, touched my hand, I added passionately: "Don't *touch* me, I say!"

Then came a hubbub! Hilda and Miss Eva in tears, because I was such a "naughty, rude boy—not a *bit* like a grown-up gentleman," remarked Hilda scathingly.

Even my mother looked surprised and reproachful, whilst my father imperatively ordered me from the room, since I could behave no better than a surly schoolboy. I was obliged to obey, fully conscious that I had made a fool of myself, and behaved like a brute to an innocent child. As a rule I hated hurting the feelings of anyone younger and weaker than myself.

Afterwards my father called me into his study, and asked me what I had to say for myself.

"If I did not know that you scarcely touch wine, I should say you had drunk too much," he said. "As it is, I can only conclude that you still have your boyish, uncontrollable temper."

"Not that," I said; "but my fatal, instinctive antipathies."

"Instinctive antipathies! Confounded nonsense!" he interrupted impatiently. "Don't talk such rubbish to me—keep it for your mother. We all take dislikes, and anyone but a fool can give a reason for his. But you cannot; so you call them by some high-sounding name, and think yourself mighty interesting, I daresay. You are a fool, sir."

"I daresay. I don't expect to convince you. There are certain things one cannot explain, and this is one of them. It is physical; on my solemn word of honour I cannot help it," I said earnestly. "I wish I could. It is not a pleasant feeling to have respecting anyone's fellow-creatures. As for ordinary dislikes, I have them just as other people do, but such dislikes are totally distinct from the other sensation. I cannot define it. But I think I have seen you yourself experience something very similar, when you once, by accident, stepped on a beetle with your bare foot. For instance, I dislike Hugh Onslow—hate him, I may say. He is a sneaking scoundrel, and I have told him so. I always quarrel with him, and feel as vindictive as a savage. But my antipathy for my Aun—I mean for this child, is quite different. I don't wish to injure them. All I ask is to avoid them. If it did not sound rather ridiculous, I might almost say I am afraid of them, as though I foresaw a vital harm they would some day do me. In short, it is an instinct—nothing more nor less."

"You do not keep your imagination in order, and some day it will pay you out," answered my father. Then he argued with me very

seriously for a long time; warning me against the mystic and supernatural elements in my nature, with a force that made me feel that perhaps, after all, such things were dangerous to dabble in.

His long service at the bar had given him vast experience of human character, with its complex motives, and extraordinary susceptibility to influences one least suspects. In criminal cases, he told me, it was hardly to be believed how many brutal, desperate and foolish crimes are originated solely in a overheated imagination, or the undue preponderance of some one morbid thought.

"I assure you I don't dwell much on it," I answered. "Unless I am actually suffering from the feeling I do not even think of it."

"But when you have it, you trust it as you trust yourself. You believe it to be an unfailing instinct. The unfortunate person damned by it is, in your opinion, hopelessly lost for ever."

"In my opinion—yes." I assented reluctantly: "but only as far as I am concerned. They may be paragons to everyone else."

"Well, it is a foolish fancy. Don't let me hear any more of it," he said. "But allow me to point out one thing. It is your intention (and my wish) to follow my own profession. I merely put it to you, if you consider that anyone subject to these unreasoning prejudices is a fit and worthy man to judge in a court of justice? And now, leave me. Good-night; and remember my advice."

During the next few years of my college career, what with hard study and new interests, I had not time to dwell on my own character, or to take much trouble in analysing my feelings; and though I still owned to the influence of certain antipathies, they affected my life so little that I certainly did not consider them any impediment to my pursuit of whatever profession I chose to select. I took my degree, managed to see a little of foreign lands, then came home to work steadily at the bar, as my father had done before me.

Only once did he allude to my boyish peculiarity, and then he asked if I was fully prepared to resist its influence, if ever it threatened to interfere with my professional duties.

"Perfectly," I answered. "For one thing, it is not likely I shall ever have to plead for or against any of my pet aversions, for I am glad to say there are but few of them. Besides, I hope I have some strength of mind."

"In some ways, plenty. I might almost say too much—I have known you needlessly passionate in your determination," said my father. "In this life, the man who cannot take things calmly lives in a continual state of mental storm. I have my suspicions that yours is an ill-regulated mind, and it would please me better if you had inherited none of your mother's romance and imaginativeness."

"And been like you—unsympathetic, hard as a nail! Well," I thought, "I believe, as a matter of fact, that my violent feelings are

merely another form of your obdurate and unyielding temper, mingled with my mother's excitability. But I can control myself."

However, shortly after this, I learnt that in one way, at least, I was as hopelessly weak and emotional as when I was a small boy, who howled with rage whenever a certain maiden aunt entered the room, or attempted to kiss him.

II.

"O, she would sing the savageness out of a bear."

We were having a dinner party for Hilda's amusement—for I am sure she was the only member of our family who found any pleasure in it. My father was in a continual fidget with the servants, and used to explode with wrath if the butler allowed any glass to be empty for half a second; and my mother was always looking for these explosions. Otherwise, I believe our dinners were considered very pleasant, and certainly my mother and Hilda possessed the art of making themselves charming. I had not this art; nor was I particularly fond of women, finding myself as clumsy on the subject of balls, gaieties, and general small talk, as an elephant on the ice.

On this occasion I took in to dinner a typical society débutante, whose conversational powers were limited to the common-place and well-regulated remarks suitable to a high-bred and well brought up girl of eighteen. It would have been against all rules for her to originate an opinion on any subject that was not strictly orthodox and fashionable. I have no doubt such a system brought her up well fitted to be a most amiable and virtuous wife, but as a conversationalist she was a lamentable failure. However, I did my best to draw her out, and was so far successful, that by the end of the second entrée there was nothing left to draw, and a hopeless silence fell between us.

I believe the well-meant young woman made a few feeble attempts to pursue the conversation, but if she did I entirely forget the drift of her remarks.

A peculiar chill had fallen over me, a repugnance so great that it was all I could do to keep my seat. There was no mistaking the nature of the sensation. Though I had not felt it for a long time it was impossible not to recognise it only too quickly, and on this occasion its strength was more overpowering than I had ever before known it to be.

Who was the cause of it? Not the insipid little creature by my side; she was too colourless to rouse any feeling stronger than a mild boredom, and her blue eyes were rather pleasant to look into than otherwise. My other neighbour had been so occupied talking to her companion that I had not yet addressed her, and I now turned to her with some interest, wondering what type of woman was exercising so strong an effect upon me. The influence was so acute, so aggres-

sive, that I felt convinced that the possessor of it must be at no great distance from me; and, true enough, as I suddenly looked round, and encountered a pair of large, dreamy blue eyes, so keen a thrill passed through me, that my dislike and repugnance must have shown itself in my face.

"You do not remember me," she said, in a very soft, musical voice. "Your sister, Hilda, is a great friend of mine; but you used to be very unkind to me when you were a boy. Do you remember now?"

"I was a very rude boy," I said awkwardly.

"You made me cry at dinner. I thought you a most alarming person in those days. I wonder if you are as severe as you used to be?"

"One does not become less severe as one grows older," I said ungraciously. "On the contrary, one grows more critical and distrustful."

She shrugged her white shoulders with a little pettish air, and deliberately turned from me to the young man on her other side, evidently out of patience with my taciturnity.

Well, so much the better; there would not be much sense in cultivating the acquaintance of one for whom I felt an antipathy that amounted to a strange foresight or warning. I did not try to make myself pleasant to her; and only wondered what unlucky fate forced me to sit through those lingering hours in close proximity to a person who caused me such an uncomfortable, physical shrinking.

Nevertheless, my eyes kept wandering back to her, each time with a more irresistible feeling of admiration. Her beauty was something rare and "spirituelle," unlike any other I have ever seen; and in spite of my dislike, my delight in all fair and lovely things forced me to yield her a most unrestrained admiration for her face alone.

I have never seen a beauty quite like Eva Fane's. The deep, dreamy eyes with their drooping lashes were alone a dower of loveliness; and the small, straight nose, curved lips, and delicate profile were faultless as the pure creations of the sculptors of old. But what struck me most was the childlike innocence of the face. It was like that of some child-angel, with the sweetest, heavenliest, most adorable expression I ever saw. No wonder that I, young, ardent, impressible, gave way to a keen, hard fight between my instinctive dislike and my involuntary admiration.

Since I could not deny her beauty, I did my best to disparage her in other ways; telling myself that a fair face means a frail mind; that such heavy-lidded eyes were signs of a sensuous and passionate temperament; that a low, soft voice was the dangerous weapon of an arrant humbug; and other trite maxims of the same sort.

I tried to forget her, and attempted some new topic with my other good and insipid little neighbour. But she seemed more irresponsive than ever, and, whether I would or no, my thoughts went wandering back to Eva Fane, with most provoking persistency.

I had a shrewd suspicion that she was talking *at* me—determined, woman-like, to punish me for my indifference, by forcing me to see how charming she could be. How well the little siren talked, to be sure! It was evident that if she had no other merit she was at least clever. And by degrees I became so much interested in the conversation she and Charlie Morris were carrying on that, if I had not disliked her so much, I could not have withheld myself from joining it. Charlie Morris, a handsome boy of twenty, was rapidly falling a victim to her fascinations; but as for appreciating or understanding the intellectual charm of her conversation, that was beyond the power of a fashionable young man who thought the only objects worthy of his attention were horses and pretty women.

All the same, I was fond of Charlie. He was not very profound, nor, if truth be told, very high-minded; but he was one of those charming people who get on well with all the world by sheer gaiety and "insouciance;" and I did not wish to see him made a fool of by a woman.

I gave a sigh of relief when the ladies left the dining-room. "Thank heaven," I exclaimed. "What an endless dinner it has been. I could not have stood Miss Fane's airs and graces much longer."

"Airs and graces? That is just what she is without," answered Morris. "She is as simple and unaffected as a child, in spite of her beauty, and the fuss people make over her. You are huffy, old fellow, because she gave you the cold shoulder."

"Not I. To tell the truth, I distrust her. She gives me the creeps. Don't let her make a fool of you, Charlie. She is probably a desperate flirt, and thinks you will be an easy victim."

"Wait till you know her. Then, cynic as you are, you will be converted. I thought you liked clever women? And she is clever. However, I don't think she will trouble you. She confided to me that you were the crossest young man it was ever her misfortune to sit next. So you see your dislike is mutual."

"So much the better. All we have to do is to avoid each other."

But this was not perfectly easy. After dinner my father took possession of Miss Fane, showing her a quantity of photographs of famous pictures in Rome and Florence; and when he was tired of acting showman, he called to me and bade me take his place.

I saw Miss Fane's eyes cloud, as though with annoyance, and for her sake, as well as my own, I made some feeble excuse about not having seen the original pictures.

"Please do not trouble him," said Miss Fane, eagerly; "Mr. Morris will take his place. He is always so good-natured."

"When I say a thing in this house it is law," said my father, with an emphasis that told me he guessed the state of affairs. "None of your confounded nonsense, Geoffrey," he added. "Miss Fane, allow me to trust my surly boy with you. He is an unlicked cub, but I have perfect faith in the power of a woman to tame him."

With this recommendation he left us together; and it is not a matter for surprise if we both felt extremely awkward and uncomfortable.

One may take dislikes, and even show them in a mild way; but to have them expressed in such a point-blank way to the object disliked is going a little beyond candour and politeness.

We neither of us spoke for some time. Miss Fane kept her eyes bent on the photographs. Her breast was heaving, and something suspicious shone on her lashes. She looked such a child—so innocent and helpless—that I felt sudden compunction for having hurt her by my ill-temper.

"You must think me a rude brute," I said stiffly. "Please forgive me: and believe me that it is only my misfortune in being born so."

The long lashes were lifted, and the lovely eyes, suffused in unshed tears, met mine reproachfully.

"I could not help his asking you to come," she began apologetically. "I *hate* being forced on anyone against his will. Please leave me."

"Not if I know it," I said, trying to laugh it off. "I must get over my shyness and we will be friends, if you are willing. My bark is worse than my bite."

"Oh, no," she answered, shaking her head; "don't be dishonest. You hate me. You know it; I know it. What is the use of pretending? Really," with an effort to look very dignified, "I think I can survive it."

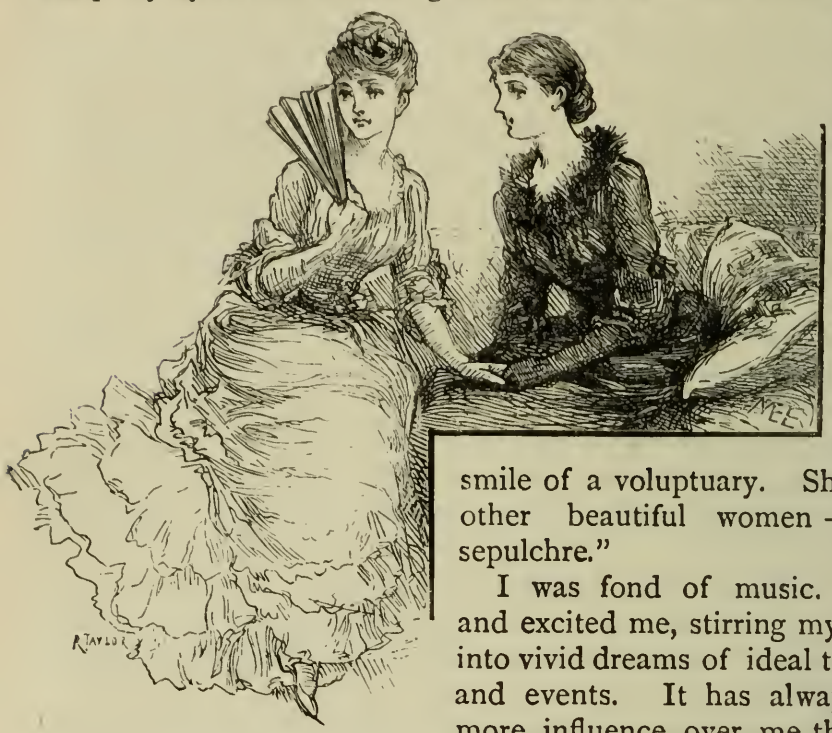
Poor child! She looked so mortified, so shy, and so pretty, that for one moment I forgot my dislike, and felt nothing but remorse for my bad manners. For some fifteen minutes I fought so successfully against all inner convictions that they were temporarily laid at rest, and, for the time being, I got on with Miss Fane as I had never done with any other woman. Once more she was the gay and charming girl who had captivated Charlie Morris at dinner; not the shy child I had frightened with my moroseness. The union of unsophisticated innocence with intellectual depth was a rarity that must have softened a Diogenes; and a strange, helpless feeling of attraction crept over me, battling so violently with my former repugnance that I began to think my reason was playing me false.

One moment a passion of admiration swept over me. She was looking up straight into my eyes through those upward curling lashes, and there was a smile on her parted lip—how well I remember it! The next instant I experienced so strong a revulsion of feeling that I drew suddenly away from her, and in the haste of my movement knocked over the portfolio, at which we were looking, with a crash on the floor. There was a horrid tightening of my heart as I stooped to pick up the photographs. Heaven forbid that I should have any more dealings with Miss Fane, I said to myself.

She joined my sister on the sofa, and I was glad, for I could not

have spoken to her at that moment. I was thankful, too, to hear Charlie Morris's voice asking her to favour him with a song. He knew she sung like a nightingale, etc. etc.

He led her to the piano. In spite of my aversion I could not keep my eyes from following them, and I saw her smiling up at him as she had just now smiled at me.



"Bah! What a little flirt!" I mentally ejaculated. "For all her apparent innocence, that is a smile of a voluptuary. She is like all other beautiful women — a whited sepulchre."

I was fond of music. It thrilled and excited me, stirring my imagination into vivid dreams of ideal things, people and events. It has always exercised more influence over me than anything else, softening my rugged heart as the touch of my mother's hand had done when I was a boy.

And when Eva Fane sang—Oh, how she sang!—every pulse of my being throbbed as I listened. That I might yield myself up to the intoxication I covered my eyes with my hand, lest I should feel jarred by a reminder of my dislike to the singer. But when the loveliest woman in the world is singing, what mortal man can keep his eyes turned from her.

I could not do it. I hated her; I distrusted her; I had a nameless horror of her presence. But against all this rose another feeling.

She had cast a spell over me. It was as though I could not gaze my fill at that angel face; could not drink in deep enough the passionate young voice that soared through the room.

When she left off singing everyone crowded round to compliment her. I alone stood aloof, I did not even move to say good-night to her, until my father called out in his rough and ready way:

"Now, Geoffrey, wake up. Where are your manners? Take Miss Fane to her carriage."

I came forward mechanically, gave her my arm downstairs, and helped her on with her cloak.

"Thank you," she said, glancing curiously at me. "You are fated to look after me; I am so sorry for you; good-night."

"Good-night," I said eagerly, holding out my hand.

As she laid hers in mine, for less than a second, the same antipathy came over me and I dropped her hand as if it had stung me.

"Let me take you to your carriage," said Charlie Morris, pushing in front of me. "This *has* been a jolly evening, Miss Fane. I shall count the hours till I meet you again."

At this she laughed, whispered back some answer and, I fancied, allowed him to squeeze the hand that rested on his arm.

"I am right; she is a born flirt. I would no more trust that woman than I would fly," I told myself again and again. "She is a siren, but she cannot deceive my instincts."

I saw a great deal of Eva Fane after this. She was Hilda's favourite friend, and was constantly in the house. At first I tried to avoid her, but gradually I became used to her presence, and the keen edge was taken off my unreasonable antipathy.

Even I could not resist such purity, such gentleness, such charm and beauty. By degrees I lost faith in my instincts, which I had used to trust so implicitly; and as I lost faith in them, I gained faith in Miss Fane.

It was the first time I had ever outgrown one of my peculiar dislikes, and it was the more noticeable, because in this case my repugnance had been even greater than usual.

I believe she had determined to conquer my rough heart, and liked me because of the novelty in finding a man who did not at once fall down and worship her. Be that as it may, she did conquer.

Before two months were over, I was as madly in love as it is possible for a man to be, and before the year was gone, Eva Fane had promised to trust herself to me as my wife.

Shortly afterwards we were married; and I do not believe any couple in the world ever began wedded life with a purer, more devoted, or more truthful affection.

II.

"Jealousy is cruel as the grave."

THEY say there is no such thing as perfect enjoyment on this earth. This may be true as regards permanent happiness, but probably most of us can look back to some period of our life, when for a short space we enjoyed a very unalloyed and perfect felicity. And whilst we had it how full of confidence we were that it would last for ever, how resolutely we blinded our eyes to its gradual decay.

I thank God now for those three years in my life of a most pure

and blissful happiness. How radiant the days were! And yet how transient! It was as if the sum of my delight, excelling that of other men, must needs be visited by a misery as intense as was the joy—to be expiated by such agony of heart and brain as I trust few human beings are called upon to experience.

Like all true affection, my love for Eva deepened as time went on. But the calm friendship of familiarity did not in my case, as so often happens, quench the eager passion of a first love, that is popularly supposed not to outlast the honeymoon.

On the contrary, the intensity of my devotion gathered force the more I knew of her sweet graces, the more I realised that so fair a bit of womanhood was mine—mine for ever, to protect, guide, cherish.

With her childlike gaiety of heart and delight in life, she was the complement wanting to my more sombre temperament and pessimist views of things, and by degrees the happy infection of her spirits roused me to a very keen appreciation of the worth of life under certain fortunate circumstances. If I was often grave, it was only because it was my nature to be so, and that I revelled in the mere *thought* of my happiness. It was sufficient for me to silently watch my girl-wife's gracious form as she moved about the room, to listen to her singing, or even to gaze on her as she lay asleep and unconscious of my presence; and then to pause, dwell over the wonderful thought that all this was *mine*—mine only, for ever.

Eva and I led a quiet and simple life. I rose quickly in my profession, and was worked harder than she liked, since it left her alone for most of the day; and she hated solitude, this gay little singing-bird of mine. She was always blithe and affectionate when I came home, and full of solicitude for my wants. A fellow had need be a surly devil not to have thawed and rejoiced under such circumstances. I did both mentally. But, looking back on recent events, I reproach myself now for the fatal reserve and diffidence that made me keep a great part of my feelings hidden. The very depth of my passion for her made me silent. Yet she knew—she must have known—that I was her slave in heart and soul, thinking, caring, hoping for nothing else on this earth.

During my brief annual holiday we used to go abroad. Eva delighted in this, looking forward to it the whole year. But for myself, I was always glad to get home, and have her to myself again. Abroad, we were not enough alone. With a beautiful wife a man finds that friends are too easily picked up everywhere, and sometimes impossible to shake off. Not that I was such a fool as to be jealous. I trusted Eva too implicitly for that; but I feared that contact with the world would tarnish my jewel, no matter how closely I watched over and cared for her.

However, the third summer after our marriage found us both eager for our annual flight to the Continent.

Eva had been rather quiet and languid of late. Once or twice she had even complained of the dulness of her life, and confessed to a secret hankering after more gaiety, such as other young wives enjoyed. As usual, she won her own way, and though I disapproved of young married women rushing night after night to balls and parties, I told Eva that as my one object was to make her happy, I would not ask her to abstain from harmless amusements if she had a real desire for them. All the same, I was sorry the taste had returned to her. For one thing, late hours overtaxed her strength, making her tired by day, and a trifle less sweet-tempered and content.

I myself was fagged with the hot weather in the airless city. I was beginning to have morbid fits of depression, for no reason; a sure sign that I required rest and relaxation.

I recollect one day in particular when this was brought home to me in a manner that gave me an unpleasant shock.

I had come home rather earlier than Eva expected me, so that I was not surprised to hear from the servant that my wife had several friends with her in the drawing-room. As a rule, she contrived to receive her visitors before I came home, knowing how ill at ease I was with the fashionable "society" acquaintances of her girlhood.

For a moment I debated in my mind whether or not I should hide in my own den until the invasion was over. Then I summoned up courage and made my way to the drawing-room.

There were two or three imitations of fashion-plates, talking with remarkable vivacity on dress and scandal; and two men, who did not appear to disdain the office of lackeys, as they fetched and carried cups and tea-cakes from one fair doll to the other. I wished they would all go, and leave me to give my Eva a kiss.

To tell the truth I felt rather "out of it," though Eva beckoned me to her side and tried to draw me into the conversation. And then, in the young man nearest to her I recognised Charlie Morris, whom I had not seen since my marriage.

"Hullo, Charlie! you back again? Glad to see you, old fellow. You are so altered that I did not know you at first," I said. "Why haven't you been near us all these years?"

"I was in India, with my regiment, until last April," he answered. "And since then I have felt rather shy of looking up old friends. One is so soon forgotten, you know."

As he spoke, I remembered that he had had a boy's attachment to Eva, and that, on our engagement, he had vowed eternal enmity against me. Probably his "eternity" lasted the duration of most calf-loves, for there was nothing of the disappointed lover about him now. He had grown very good-looking—just what I had always expected; a lady-killer, and something of a dandy; yet in spite of it, very good company for any man, with a certain frankness about him that disarmed criticism.

He was telling us some of his sporting adventures in the jungle

(what Englishman ever went to India without falling in with some miraculous personal experiences?) and I remember how much more I was thinking of Eva than of his stories—how pretty, and eager, and interested she looked—when suddenly, an old half-forgotten feeling crept over me, turning my heart, as it were, into a lump of ice that sent a chill through my whole being.

I suppose I looked peculiar, or changed colour, for Eva exclaimed:

"What is the matter, Geoff?"

"Nothing. Why should there be?" I said roughly, annoyed at the question, and I moved a little away from her.

She raised her eyebrows with a little surprise, but smiled her forgiveness of my brusqueness, and went on talking with her friends.

As for me, I sat apart, not joining in or listening to the conversation, whilst a horrid discomfort and remorse afflicted me.

It was the first time I had ever spoken in a rough tone of voice to Eva; I had meant never to do so, and yet now, all in a moment, I had felt uncontrollably irritable and cross with her. Why? What had she done to deserve it? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

But, alas, the truth was not to be evaded. The old, strange antipathy had risen within me; a fierce and relentless demon against whom I was to fight now, again and again, as a man fights for dear life when the odds are against him.

When at last Eva's guests left us, I was sitting in my arm-chair at the far end of the room, ostensibly buried in the *Quarterly Review*.

I was not the first to speak. I wanted time to recover myself—to force down the unloyal feeling which had assailed me. Thank God, I succeeded; and when she came and sat on the arm of my chair, I was able to meet her words and her gaze with a sincere and passionate affection.

"I was cross to you, my darling," I said; "I am over-worked and bad-tempered."

"Poor boy. But it was nothing. You did not mean anything, did you? But, do you know, for one moment your face quite startled me. It reminded me of the days before you liked me. Do you remember? How cross and rude you used to be. I recollect Hilda telling me she believed you must have got one of your peculiar antipathies for me. How ridiculous, when we really liked each other all along, wasn't it?"

"Most ridiculous. But Hilda was never famed for tact or wisdom."

"It wasn't true, was it?" she went on. "I should not like to think that, for fear the dislike should come back again. But, there, you say you never, even for a time, grow out of an antipathy."

"I believe I have grown out of them altogether. It is ages since I have felt one, though I confess that Aunt Matilda's teeth give me a

shudder," I answered lightly. "Thanks to you, Eva, my life is more full of love than hate. So much so that I am half afraid of it. Is it possible to love too well, too passionately?"

"Not if you trust me, Geoff. I should not like a jealous Bluebeard for my husband."

"Trust you? My angel!"

Early in August we arrived at D—— ville, a French watering-place to which Eva had taken a fancy. It was not exactly an interesting place to a man who had the bad taste to find a weariness of the flesh in gossip and scandal, sea-bathing and Casino dissipations, and to look down upon the hysterical merriment of the average Frenchwoman, and the elegant fopperies of the "Jeune France" who hovered in her wake.

It was all new to Eva, and, to my wonderment, it amused her more than any of the places in Italy and Switzerland to which I had taken her in previous years.

"I am a baby," she would say, resting her head on my shoulder and looking up into my face in a way which she knew to be irresistible. "But when I hear music my feet ache to dance, and so you *will* take me to the Casino to-night, Geoff?"

Of course I always consented, sometimes expostulating feebly, and asking her how soon she would be tired of this kind of life.

One evening, shortly after our arrival at D—— ville, she suggested that it was a pity one should be bored for the sake of the other, adding that, unless I let her go to the Casino without me, she would not go at all.

"Why should I drag my poor old bear everywhere?" she said; "he is too good and unselfish. As a reward I will stay quietly at home with him to-morrow. And to-night he shall have a reprieve, too, and let me go to the Casino with Madame La Barre. She is such a good old thing, she will take the greatest care of me. Do you hear, Geoff? Will you trust your spoilt wife this once?"

"Trust her—yes. But I would rather come. I am not such a lazy fellow as to drop my principles for the sake of a night's rest. Don't you want me, you dangerous little girl?"

"I always want you," she answered, kissing me; "but why should you always sacrifice yourself. Let me go to-night, and, if I find I want you *very* badly, you will come another time, won't you? I will be so good."

"Well, I consent; only do not overtire yourself."

I was surprised after I had answered. A few hours ago nothing would have made me agree to the plan. Now I felt utterly indifferent, as if it had nothing to do with me.

Indifferent at first—then, gradually eager that the hour should come for her to go—and, at last, God help me, feeling a perfect shudder of horror as her soft, delicate cheek rested against mine.

I sprang up and threw open the window with an exclamation of relief.

'How hot it is! If you won't be dull, I shall go for a brisk walk and bathe before dinner. This lazy, enervating life does not agree with me. Thank heaven, I am not a Frenchman to sit all day under a woman's parasol. Au revoir. I shall be back by dinner-time.'

But I could not walk off the sensation. It was there, strong as ever, when we sat down to our dinner, never leaving me for a moment; though at the same time I loved her, with such a fierce and passionate love that I felt I could not endure, for one second, to have her out of my sight, with her angel face and eyes.

"I love her too much. It is becoming a madness," I told myself. "She is too good and gentle for such a savage as I."

It struck me that she was in an unusual hurry to be gone. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement, and her feet were beating valse measure the whole of dinner time. Now and then her eyes wandered to the looking-glass, and a smile involuntarily parted her lips.

"She is vain and frivolous like all women," thought I; "I was a fool to think otherwise."

At last she left me, a prey to most melancholy thoughts, that refused to be shaken off.

I recalled the unfailing penetration of all my other antipathies of this nature. Not one of them had ever been proved unjust or mistaken; subsequent events had invariably upheld their infallibility, and shown the object of it to be in one way or another untrustworthy and dangerous to me.

Why, I asked, should I flatter myself that Eva was to be the one exceptional case—Eva, for whom, when the dislike did come, it was so extraordinarily bitter and intense?

The more I thought over it the more I trembled to think of the grim and relentless shadow that must inevitably cast itself over the light of our love; the more I knew that the old trustful, serene happiness was gone now for ever.

And what would Eva think if, at some unguarded moment, I showed my feelings by roughness or cruel coldness? Would she believe in and understand the strange characteristic that could enable me at once to love and, on rare occasions, to hate her? No. It was impossible for her gentle nature to realise such glaring inconsistency.

All these dreary, morbid forebodings I ought to have fought against and shaken off. No one could have known that better than I did myself. But the effort was beyond my strength. I felt powerless in the hands of Fate. A superstition which had long ago engrafted itself in my very being, led me in iron chains away from all vestige of hope and faith.

Probably those who read this will, long ere now, have lost all patience, and will scorn me as a weak-minded hypochondriac who but little deserved a wife like Eva. If so, I would have you put yourself

in my place, if by any superhuman effort of the imagination you can do so. Then you will understand the inexorable force that governed me. It was no tangible reality that I could slay by a mere effort of strength, no hysterical mood to be conquered by sheer steadiness of purpose ; rather, it was a deep presentiment or conviction which my inner consciousness told me I should be a fool to disregard.

There are a certain few amongst mankind who are blessed, or cursed, with so keen a vision of things generally concealed from men, that they are considered to be inspired, divinely gifted, or ecstatic visionaries, as the case may be. Their firm belief in their visions is a guarantee of their reality and genuineness. And though others are unable to understand or follow the keenness of their perceptions, most people are inclined to believe that the faculty is a high and inspired one—a partial lifting of the veil that hangs between us and the unseen.

I firmly believe my peculiar infirmity (for, owing to a disastrous combination of circumstances it became the reverse of a blessing) to have been of this nature. Not that I wish to excuse myself for what occurred.

On the contrary, I pray and exhort all who are subject to presentiments of any kind whatsoever, to take warning by my miserable experience. Do not become the slave of your impressions ; do not, by nursing them in the unhealthy, enervating arms of your imagination, turn a natural gift from God into a terrible burden.

Can I ever forget that wretched night ?

For long I sat in solitude, with my two feelings for Eva, my love and my hate, laid out, as it were, before me to be weighed and balanced the one against the other.

All my reason—or what I called such—went on the side of my dislike, counselling me against the consequences that might ensue if I neglected the warning I had received. On the other side was my love, pure and simple—so pure and simple that it was sacrilege to gaze searchingly on it in pursuit of a flaw ; and presently I sprang up with a sigh, repeating what I had said before : "I love her too much. It is a madness."

Then I thought, perhaps if I were to see her, to look on her face, the evil tempter might flee. Her eyes were enough to disarm the evil one himself. Perhaps they would recall me to my senses.

I hurried down to the Casino. It was a warm night, and the terrace of the Casino, gaily decorated with Chinese lanterns, was crowded with fashionables. As I passed below, my eyes and ears were on the alert to catch a glimpse of my wife, or the sound of her voice. Yet, I scarcely knew why, I had a vague hope that I should not see her there, and that she would be in the ball-room, whence I could hear the exhilarating strains of one of her favourite valses.

But I was disappointed—if so vague a feeling can be called disappointment.

Surely that was Eva coming forward now, leaning on the arm of a young man, her face raised eagerly towards his, as he bent over with something more than deferential politeness. They came and leant over the balustrade of the terrace, and as the light fell on them I recognised my wife and Charlie Morris.

Looking back over past years there are certain scenes, places, persons, that rise up before us again and again, with startling vividness—scenes that very likely made very little actual impression on us at the time they presented themselves to us, but which afterwards became indelibly fixed upon our mental retina.

One scene that I could never forget is this: Charlie Morris and Eva as they stood side by side that summer evening in the moonlight, unconscious of my mad gaze as I stood there, concealed in the shadow of the terrace.

See! her eyes are melting into his; her lips are trembling as they smile. The colour comes and goes in her fair face; and in face and lips a smile, nay, even in the sadness of her tender eyes there is something strange written. Something that has never been there for me.

Never for me has she trembled and blushed as she is trembling and blushing now. And he? His eyes are forcing her secrets from her—are pouring out to her his own vile, traitorous purpose.

I do not know how long I watched them, but this I know; when I at last turned into the Casino, my heart was full of a horror and hatred so fierce that had Eva met me then, I could not have spoken to her; the very contact of her hand would have made me shrink with loathing from her very touch. As I hurried through the ball-room on my way homewards, I saw them seated away from the crowd, on a sofa in the conservatory, looking as calm as if that passionate episode on the balcony had been only a dream of my disordered imagination.

It had come. No longer was there any hope for us. I was, of all men on the face of the earth, the most miserable and despairing.

How I passed that night I scarcely remember. It was spent partly in passionate appeal to God, to save me from myself; partly in close wrestling with the danger that had laid its cruel arms round my great happiness.

I succeeded in concealing my grief from Eva, at all events for the present, and was able, in a day or two, to look facts more calmly in the face. And this I resolved: to hide my feeling from Eva at any cost; to *outlove* my hate, if possible; and never, come what might, let a hard word or look escape me in her presence.

Perhaps it had been more frank and trustful, if I had told her that I had seen her that night with Charlie Morris. But the words stuck in my throat. I felt that it was for her to tell me; and I was grievously disappointed that she did not do so. When we met him, next day, on the sands, she half pretended to be surprised to see him, and even to be a little bored by his presence. This small deception

sent a pang through me—not so much of anger as of regret and pity for her. She was so young and innocent that she could not thoroughly understand the peril of even so slight a concealment between husband and wife.

From that day we were haunted by Charlie Morris. If we walked on the sands, there was Charlie, eager to take her out in a boat. If we planned an excursion, when we arrived at our destination, there was Charlie, ready to show her the best views to sketch; if we went to the Casino, there again was Charley to dance with her the whole night. Whether she kept him informed of our movements or not, I cannot tell; at all events he invariably discovered them and tracked us out.

For some time I managed to control myself tolerably, but one fact had forced itself upon me. Though when alone with Eva I still often felt for her nothing but the deepest love, the moment Charlie appeared on the scene, my antipathy for her resumed its sway. On looking back, I saw that, unknown to me, it had always been so from the very first time I had ever seen Eva and Charlie together. It was impossible to avoid conjectures as to the cause of this curious coincidence: and equally impossible to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion.

The strange part of it was, that my antipathy should always be roused against my wife, not against Charlie. I distrusted and disliked him; but only as I should dislike and distrust any man who tried to thrust himself between husband and wife. And, as I have said, my antipathies were quite distinct from ordinary hatred; rather, it made me shrink from a person as though conscious that he would do me some mortal injury; and, as a rule, my instinct did not belie itself. Yet, what harm could my gentle little Eva do to anyone, much less to me, whom she loved?

We were neither of us happy during those weeks at D——ville. It was not in the nature of the case that I should be so, and most probably my fitful mood was not unnoticed by Eva. I tried to be as affectionate as ever, and even assumed a forced gaiety and levity of manner. But now and then, when the dreaded feeling possessed me, I could not quite dissemble. Yet, even when I shrank from her, or turned from her with sullen, averted looks, my heart was bleeding from the knowledge that I was hurting the feelings of the one person in the world I cared for. Perhaps if I had had more moral courage, things might have improved. But it is too late now to think what might have been.

Whenever I was alone I brooded over this question: Should I not be a fool to disregard so persistent a warning? Never before had I found it at fault. At a private school, had I not felt it for Harold Grey, who caused me to be expelled in disgrace for a fault committed by him? Had not my Aunt Matilda tried, all my life, to sow ill-feeling between me and my father? Had not Reggie Seabright done me

injuries that no man could forgive? And why should Eva alone defy the oracle? Impossible, I thought, impossible.

It is my destiny to be ruined by her—how or when I could not imagine, or by what agencies, or with what intentions. Come what might there was no escape for me.

At last, when I felt my misfortune growing stronger and more overwhelming, I made one desperate effort to shake it off, and suddenly announced to Eva my intention of leaving D——ville, and taking her to Spain until the expiration of my holiday.

She could not quite conceal her disappointment; but submitted with her usual sweet-tempered gentleness; and two days later we were on our way to Biarritz, en route for Spain.

IV.

"Not wisely, but too well."

I CANNOT linger over this part of my story. Every hour of that short fortnight is printed in letters of fire in my heart and brain; but not to be shown to the cold, unsympathetic gaze of man.

I was moderately happy—sometimes, for a brief period, deliriously happy, in the renewal of my love for Eva. I forced myself to stifle all fear and distrust, and, with the constant dread before me of a return of my mania, tried to press a whole lifetime of love into the present, short-lived as I knew it must be.

Having arrived at Biarritz, we learnt that Spain, at this time of year, is only fit for a Salamander; and as Eva could not stand much heat, we put off our journey to Seville, and contented ourselves with trips to the places of interest round Biarritz.

The day and night we spent at San Sebastian—a day and night never to be forgotten—it seemed to me that Eva's sweetness and lovableness reached their climax. I could not take my eyes off her, and in my love and admiration I was at one moment mute and still, at another carried away by passionate fervour.

We wandered about among the quaint old shops, buying little odds and ends for friends at home—fans, laces, little daggers and old ornaments.

When we returned to the hotel, Eva amused herself by dressing up in some of the quaint stuffs and embroideries, and made me watch her as she practised the art of draping a black lace mantilla after the fashion of Spanish beauties.

"See! is that right? Do I look like a wicked Spanish woman?" she said merrily. "No, my eyes are not dark enough, and I often wish my eyes were dark and tragic; don't you, Geoff?"

"I like them best as they are, blue and tender," I answered, catching hold of her. "You must not let anyone see you with this thing on your head, Eva; it makes you too pretty. I might have a duel brought on my shoulders. Vain little woman."

"Ah! take care; do not offend me," she said, snatching something out of the folds of her mantilla, "or I will act up to my assumed character, and take a deadly revenge. See! This little dagger is quite sharp. If I wished, I could kill you, Geoffrey. Are you not trembling in your shoes?"

She had thrown her head back on her shoulders; the black lace fell softly round the delicate white and pink of her child-face; the parted red lips showed a line of straight white teeth, clenched in playful mockery, as she raised the dagger over my heart.

Her loveliness frightened me. For one moment, as I gazed at the lustrous blue eyes, half hidden by heavy white lids, I was startled by their dreamy voluptuousness—something so strangely out of place in the innocent child-like face.

And then, with a sudden rush of horror, my hatred crept over me like a cruel spell. If anyone can understand me, I would say that mind and body were full of a loathing hatred that convulsed me *physically* and *mentally*, whilst in my heart love still burned with a desperate craving to outlive my hate.

I remember seizing her in my arms as though I would crush the life out of her, and kissing her madly on lips and brow and cheeks, as if, in my passion, I would kiss her to death. It was love and hate fighting over her for mastery.

When I released her I fell back exhausted. For the moment, all power to think or feel seemed to have gone from me, and my hand was shaking like that of a nervous woman.

Eva was staring curiously at me, with a frightened look that had something of horror in it. I could have cursed myself for my folly in thus making an exhibition of myself; and could only force out a feeble laugh as I said:

"Forgive me, little one. I am a bear. Are you afraid of me?"

"Sometimes, yes. Especially lately," she answered, adding, half regretfully. "I almost wish you did not love me so much, Geoff. If ever you are harsh for a moment, I am half pleased; you see, it is so difficult always to *live up to* a great love—always to be good and worthy of it; for I am not good really."

"Too good for me. The proof of it is, that I am a selfish brute to drag you away from your amusements to be alone with a grave and eccentric husband. Well, we will go back to Biarritz to-morrow, and I will take you to the dance at the Casino."

Instead of thanking me, she blushed crimson, and gave a stifled sigh. But I thought nothing of it, and kept my word, believing that I was doing her a kindness, instead of, as the events proved, leading her into the very jaws of temptation.

The following night I took Eva to the Casino, as I had promised.

Though I was never a ball-going man, I could generally amuse myself watching other people, making conjectures about their characters

and histories, and trying to fathom the great charm "folly" has for most of mankind.

Besides this, I was so proud of Eva, that I enjoyed watching the admiration she excited, and in knowing that so beautiful a creature belonged to me, and to no other.

However, as the hours wore on, I began to feel rather bored and sleepy; and as Eva was engaged for several more dances, I left the ball-room, and settled myself, with a cigar, on the terrace outside.

Several couples came and went whilst I was there. But in my dark corner I remained undisturbed and unseen, hidden by a bush of myrtle, behind which I had discovered a snug retreat.

I believe I dropped off into a kind of half sleep, for suddenly I roused with a start, on hearing voices close to me, and became most intensely wide-awake and watchful.

"Don't tell me that you do not love me," were the words that fell on my ear, "for I should not believe it. You cannot have changed in a fortnight."

"Yes, I do love you," answered a woman's voice, low but distinct. "It is no use fighting against it any longer. Oh, Charlie!"

It was the voice of my wife.

I did not speak or stir. I was too stunned and horror-struck to make a movement. And then the man's voice went on—it was that of Charlie Morris. I knew its deep tones only too well.

"Do not try to resist it, my darling. Love will not be checked or guided. We are meant for each other. We have always loved each other, though we did not know it until too late. Eva, I cannot live without you. I could not keep away to-night. I have been waiting and watching until Geoffrey went home, and now I must make you tell the truth. You love me, Eva?"

"I love you—yes—yes. But Geoffrey? Oh, he terrifies me. He is hardly human sometimes. I have felt it grow worse and worse. And yet, poor fellow, he loves me—and believes in me."

I cannot explain the expression with which she said those last words—"Poor fellow—he believes in me."

It was with a contemptuous pity that I was able to find a kind of wondering amusement in my credulity. It dashed from me every illusion, and laid bare the truth in all its hideous dishonour.

She was false—had always been so. She, whom I had deemed as pure as snow, as guileless as an angel. In a moment I was transformed from a reasoning being into a madman.

"Then," went on Charlie, in a low, eager voice, "if you love me, you will leave Geoffrey. He is not worthy of you. His gloomy misanthropy is enough to kill your very beauty. Eva—Eva—I will live only for you. We could be far away from him in twenty-four hours. Come—to-morrow—when you will—only do not be afraid of loving me."

"I will," she whispered. "Heaven *must* forgive us, when we love each other so well."

Then they moved away, and I crept out of my corner, with murder in my heart.

I must have wandered about blindly; for when I reached home it was daylight, and the early sun gave a ghostly, deserted air to the saloon, as I passed through it to my bedroom.

I opened the door quietly, and went up to the bed.

She had come home before me, then. She was sleeping calmly as a child, one hand under her cheek, her ruffled golden hair curling over her shoulder.

I bent over her, and groaned.

"My love, my love, why have you left me?"

Then madness came over me again. I thought of her youth, her innocence, her beauty, and of the tragedy she was bringing upon herself. And as I thought of it, I almost forgot my anger in a great pity that Heaven could suffer so fair a creation to undergo worse than death.

"She is mine," I murmured over and over again. "She shall never belong to another."

And then again I hated her as she lay there before me. Hated her as only a madman can hate; yet I loved her. The surging passion of my two feelings met and fought, until they became as it were one, not to be distinguished from each other. I was lifted out of myself—carried away in a state of wild exaltation.

The little dagger she had played with yesterday, lay on the table by her side, under some roses, and with one of her long white gloves thrown down near it. I lifted up the dagger.

"I will save her," I murmured. "As she has lived she shall die—innocent—for I believe the struggle between right and wrong is still going on. If she has loved wrongly, God will forgive her for the pain it has caused her. I believe she is pure still. I will save her. I will send her to God to be sanctified. She is mine, and I will give her to Him. God will have mercy on her soul."

This is my story. Another six hours, and I, too, shall have gone to meet my God. I have been judged of men harshly; God will have known my struggles, my helplessness.

And He alone knows whether we shall meet again—my wife and I. I cannot tell. I can only pray that my agony on earth may have been sufficient punishment and atonement.

To-morrow I shall know all that has puzzled me here on earth; I shall stand at the great Assize.

I entreat you, pray for my soul.

KATHERINE CARR.

ONE MIDSUMMER NIGHT.

I.

CLAUDE MAYNARD contrived to get a fair amount of enjoyment out of life chiefly by not doing like other people. At a season when most strangers, especially Englishmen, have left Italy he remained in it; and, instead of following beaten tracks, and roasting in crowded seaside hotels or noisy mountain-pensions, he wandered, knapsack on shoulder, through picturesque byways, and discovered unfamiliar places of interest.

For there are still a few unexplored spots in Italy.

In one such out-of-the-world *borgo*, too large for a village, too small for a town, Claude Maynard had elected to pass the greater part of a hot summer. He had been, until lately, an artist by profession; but he was a poet by nature, and he found plenty to amuse, interest and occupy him in the bare, wind-swept Piazza, and the glory of the landscape that stretched beyond it, and was bounded by the misty blue of Umbrian Hills.

An intimate, characteristic life went on perpetually in that wide square; centred round the booths (where nobody ever seemed to buy anything) on week days, and flowed to and from the church on festas; sisters of Sant Agata, in heavy serge dresses and wide straw hats; brown, bare-legged peasants, driving the milk-white oxen and vermilion cart familiar to all dwellers in the Tuscan vales; a priest or two; a stray capuchin; a more frequent pedlar; the newly-enriched confectioner, from the largest neighbouring town; the hopeless, weedy-looking young patrician, who got through a colourless existence by dawdling about all day with a pointer at his heels and playing dominoes in the café with the barber of an evening. All these made up a living picture with which Claude Maynard grew day by day more familiar, as he leaned from the window of his little lodging above the aforesaid barber's shop. That was the principal, indeed the only, lodging in the place, and small and scantily-furnished enough it was. But it satisfied its present occupant, who had only to look from his window in order to feast his eyes to satiety on purple slopes of hill and green stretches of vineyard and orchard, where pale pink roses grew in a tangle beneath the grey of the olives.

He made sketches of the white oxen and the vermilion carts, of the girls at their straw-plaiting, and the bare-footed urchins playing *mora* in the sunlight; but his real object in staying on was not work. He had been in this very same neighbourhood some ten years previously, and had then met with an adventure, if such it deserved to be called.

Ten years ago Claude, wandering as now, knapsack on shoulder,

among the Tuscan hills, had found himself in the course of a longer ramble than usual on a little grassy piazza in front of a small church —one of those churches without any adjacent parish, which have survived by many centuries the pious congregations that founded them, and are of frequent recurrence in Italy.

It was a hot and sultry afternoon. The July sun had parched the land and dried up all the flowers. The perfume and grace, the sweet, subtle stir of early summer had fled. The earth was burning, and the ceaseless grind of the cicalas was the only sound of insect life that broke the stillness of the brooding air.

Claude sat down on a low wall overlooking the fertile valley, through which flows the graceful opalescent Ema—one of Arno's tributaries. Opposite to him, on the other side of the grassy square, was a low open door which led down three stone steps into an olive-garden and a corn-field. A week or two previously the golden grain had bowed with a rhythmic motion as the wind swept over it; scarlet poppies blazed like fire in its midst; at night, as the last pale amber tints of sunset were fading from the sky, myriads of fireflies flittered and flashed and danced like enchanted jewels among the shadowy, serried ranks of the corn.

All this glory was gone now. The grain was cut and garnered, the fireflies had vanished, the arid melancholy of a southern summer wrapped the sunset and the dawn. A strange impression of sadness took possession of Claude. To the right of the parapet where he had placed himself, rose the high wall of a garden, planted, after the manner of gardens in Italy, with cedars and glistening magnolias and feathery acacias. No song of birds or stir of leaves broke the oppressive stillness.

Who lived in that silent garden? Who worshipped in that deserted church? These were questions that Claude asked himself as he sat there and saw no soul go by, and began to feel as if everything he looked on were a mirage.

The day was ageing apace, yet still Claude lingered. He started when suddenly the Ave Maria bell rang out from the tower of the little church. Almost at the same moment, a small, mysterious-looking green door in the garden wall opened, and forth glided a lady dressed in white.

She passed quickly across the square to the side of the church, unlocked a low door and entered. But swift as had been her movements she had turned her face for an instant towards Claude, and he had been startled by its unspeakable, despairing sadness. Instinctively, his kind heart and romantic imagination touched by the sense of a mystery, he rose and followed her.

He did not exactly know what he meant to do: not speak to her, certainly. Perhaps if summoned to explain himself, he would have said that he simply wished to explore the church. The lady had left the door ajar, and softly pushing it open the artist went in.

It was a bare little church—gaudy where decorated, and uninteresting generally. Hideous pictures adorned the side chapels, and unlovely bouquets of paper flowers graced the altar. Claude's æsthetic sense was revolted, but he did not go away.

For, crouching down in front of an image of the Madonna Addolorata, was the lady he had followed. She was sobbing bitterly, her delicate frame shaken with emotion: and every now and again a passionate cry burst from her. "My Yolande! my little child!"

The cry went straight to Claude Maynard's tender heart. Obeying an impulse of purest compassion, he drew near to the weeping woman, and said gently: "Signora, can I help you? Is your child ill? Shall I go for a doctor?"

She stopped sobbing and looked up at him bewildered, with widely-opened eyes, into which some gleam of surprise wandered as she gazed. Claude repeated his question, upon which she shook her head with a simple movement like a child's. "My Yolande is not ill," she said; "she is away from me."

Her voice was soft and flute-like: her expression singularly young: her face like her frame, delicate and ethereal. But something in her look suggested to Maynard that she was not very strong in her mind; not quite like other people, in fact. An immense pity for her invaded him. Who could be so brutal as to allow her to suffer, he asked himself. Could anyone not see that she must break beneath sorrow like a lily beneath the storm?

"But Yolande will come back," said Claude hastily, not staying to inquire or to weigh his words as he would have done with another person.

A smile of innocent pleasure came to his listener's lips for an instant; then died away mournfully.

"They promise, but they never bring her," she said.

"*I* will bring her," exclaimed Claude impetuously. "Tell me where she is."

The lady looked at him as if fascinated: rapture and doubting, and some strange, half-terrified pain struggling in her face.

"Where is she?" repeated the painter, carried away by his feelings, and never pausing to think to what he was committing himself.

She looked troubled: put her hand to her head with a pathetic movement, and replied sadly: "I—I forget!"

Strange, unspoken tragedy! What could it mean? While Claude asked himself the question, the lady, still on her knees, gazed up at him with a perplexed, half-hopeful expression, more touching than anything he had ever imagined. It was plain that she dimly expected him to remember all that she had forgotten, and what was he to say? Perhaps the child was a delusion. Perhaps it was dead.

"Maddalena," called a harsh voice; and with a shudder of unmistakable terror the lady sprang to her feet.

A woman, past middle age, bent, harsh-featured, malignant-looking,

stood at the open door. Her eyes had fixed themselves, after one swift glance at the painter, on her whom she had called Maddalena. She looked, Claude thought, like an evil witch. "Come away," she said sternly, and advanced towards Maddalena, who shrank away from her, stretched out her hands as if to clasp Claude's arm, then dropped them again and stood trembling, appealing.

"He says he will bring Yolande to me," she said suddenly, with the piteous, uncertain smile of one who no longer knows whether gladness be allowed.

"*Che! che!*" said the older woman contemptuously; then laid her bony fingers on Maddalena's shoulder and led her away.

Claude followed, longing to speak, but not knowing what to say. Once outside the church, the elder woman locked the door, and still leading her companion, bent her steps towards the garden. "Buona notte!" she said to Maynard, not curtly, but in a manner that forbade interrogation. Maddalena had resumed her heart-broken sobbing, but spoke no other word. Only just before she disappeared she turned her sweet, bewildered face towards the painter, and cast him one last, despairing look.

It haunted him as he walked at last swiftly away towards the town where he could find the nearest shelter for the night. It dwelt with him all the next day, and inspired him with the resolution to return to the scene of his adventure. But he was called to England on business; and ten years elapsed before he again, a man of thirty, a little sadder, a little wiser but not harder-hearted, returned to Tuscany.

During the intermediate period the recollection of Maddalena had grown dim. It emerged again into vividness when he found himself among the old scenes, the vineyards and olives, the misty blue hills. He felt positive that the little church and grassy square and mysterious-looking garden were not very far from his present abode, but he never could find his way thither.

II.

He had thought of Maddalena, and the malignant old witch who guarded her, every day for a fortnight, and had explored endless byways in the hope of hitting, once again, upon that little grassy square. Then he had half given up the pursuit: allowed his mind to be absorbed by other things: was beginning, even vaguely, to form plans for a tour through Southern Italy, when one hot evening he climbed a hill-side path, raised his eyes and found himself beside the little church!

The shock of the first surprise took away his breath. On recovering from that, he noticed that everything was outwardly unchanged. The day was as hot as on his last visit: the very hour was about the same. Inside the silent garden the parched acacia blossoms were

dropping, one by one, to the ground. The ceaseless grind of the cicalas filled the air. Opposite to him the little door of the *podere* stood open, and the grey leaves of the olives hung motionless in the heat.

He went down the three steps into the *podere* and looked around.

Signs of human habitation there were, but of human inhabitants, none. The whole scene was as still as though some wizard's spell dwelt on it, and the old strange sense of unreality took possession of the artist. He went back, sat down on the low parapet, and waited.

The sun set—a fiery ball, and the Ave Maria rang out from the little church; but this time, to Claude's disappointment, no white robed figure glided forth from the garden-door. To the gate of the *podere*, indeed, there came a gaunt lantern-jawed peasant, who stared for an instant at the Englishman: then closed the gate, locked it and vanished. This brief apparition only made the subsequent loneliness seem greater. To the sunset had succeeded not even a moment of twilight, for behind the church, where the painter could not see it, the full moon was rising like a ruddy shield. Slowly its lovely radiance grew and grew, filling the air with unspoken magic.

Claude started with a feeling of fantastic excitement when suddenly a cry of exquisite despair shivered the illumined silence of that weird and splendid night. It came from the garden, apparently. The artist sprang to his feet; then hesitated; gazed. The garden-gate opened and out rushed a young girl: a slender, delicate-looking thing, etherealised by the moonlight.

She did not see the watcher by the wall, but standing still in the middle of the little square, glanced up at the cruel, radiant heavens with a gesture of tragic appeal. "How long—oh God!—how long?" she cried aloud in English, then sank on her knees and hid her face, as the mournful cry once again rang out.

"Yolande!" called a harsh, imperious voice which Claude recognised instantly. The old witch—unchanged, except that she was older and more sinister-looking than before—stood in the doorway and called to the girl. The latter rose with a passionate movement, and was evidently about to speak, when her glance fell on Claude Maynard. She gave a start of surprise, then darted away like a swallow, and the painter, with a pang of disappointment, heard the garden-door close roughly behind her.

Claude rose and walked away, something telling him that he would see nothing more that night. The whole scene had been so brief and so strange that but for the spoken words he might almost have persuaded himself that he had been witnessing some ghostly drama—one of those mystic acts which, according to spirit-seers, repeat themselves on certain anniversaries for ever.

But he was, on the contrary, quite persuaded that what he had witnessed was very real; and, moreover, an idea had occurred to him which made his heart leap with excitement. He wondered why he

had not thought of it before—ten years previously, when he first heard that name of Yolande.

He had wandered too far for a return to his usual quarters; so he sought a lodging in the quaint little commune which had sheltered him ten years ago; and all the night through he tossed from side to side, revolving a theory which grew more fascinating the more he realised its improbability.

On rising, he wrote and despatched a letter to his men of business in England; then wended his way back to the wind-swept piazza by the famous church with the golden grotto. There he found the barber and the *curata*, the girls who plaited straw, and even the idle young patrician with the pointer at his heels, in a state of great excitement, lest the amiable Inglese was lost, or had been waylaid and come to some harm. Great was the joy on his reappearance, and great but unappeased the curiosity as to what might have detained him.

For a week and more Claude painted busily, cheating suspense, as alone it can be cheated, by work; and then one morning the answer from England came.

"Dear Sir," wrote the lawyers—"We have not been as long as we anticipated in obtaining the information which you desired, as a person from Melbourne, who was acquainted with some of the facts, happened to come into our office a few hours after your latest letter arrived.

"It appears that your late grandfather, Mr. John Fairlie, when writing some years after the death of his son to your Uncle Robert, to offer the shelter of his home to Miss Yolande Fairlie, made it a condition that she should not only come alone, but cease all intercourse with her mother and that lady's family. In the event of her strictly observing his wishes in every respect, Mr. J. Fairlie promised to make the young lady his sole heiress. She accordingly went to Melbourne, and there remained until about three years ago, when she had reached the age of seventeen. It is believed that she then suddenly announced the resolution of returning to her mother. Mr. Fairlie objected strenuously, but in vain. The young lady was firm, and a complete rupture between herself and her grandfather was the consequence. Our informant understands, but only from hearsay, that she is now residing in Italy—he believes in Tuscany.—We are, etc. etc.

"Hastie and Foljambe."

This letter gave Claude Maynard much matter for reflection. His family history was in some respects an unusual one. His grandfather, John Fairlie, had gone out, a poor man, to Australia, and by dint of hard-headed intelligence and unflinching work, had achieved wealth, influence and distinction. He was a man of strong prejudices, a stern Dissenter, and something of a domestic tyrant.

His children had in many ways disappointed him. Two out of the three, at any rate, had so done. He sent them all, the son and two daughters, to Europe to be educated; but only one of the girls, his favourite as it happened, returned to Australia, and there married. She obtained an immense influence over her father, and, being passionately devoted to her own two children, fanned the flame of discord between her brother and sister on the one side, and their parent on the other. Unhappily the brother and sister's own conduct was of a nature to facilitate her schemes. The sister, Claude's mother, had eloped from school with an infantry officer, between whose own father and Mr. John Fairlie there had, when both were young men and near neighbours, been a bitter feud.

The brother, Robert, had done even worse; for besides being dissipated and idle, he had married an Italian girl, who, naturally, was a Roman Catholic, and clung obstinately to her faith. Robert Fairlie died, comparatively early, leaving one little girl, Yolande, the youngest born, and only survivor of a large and delicate family. But, all entreaties notwithstanding, Mr. Fairlie never consented to look on the face of his alien daughter-in-law. Nor was he ever reconciled to Mrs. Maynard. The father and daughter met several times during a brief visit of the former to Europe, when Claude was about seven years old, but most of the interviews ended in a quarrel. Mrs. Maynard, loving and high-spirited, resented the reflections cast by her father on her husband; and her sister was always there to widen the breach which passionate reproaches made. Both Claude's parents died young, and Mr. Fairlie then contributed a yearly sum to his orphan grandson's education, but troubled himself in no other way about him.

No letters ever passed between the old man and the boy; and Claude was usually dependent on chance for any news of his relatives in Australia. Thus accidentally he once learnt that a boating casualty had deprived his aunt, at one fell swoop, of her husband and her two sons. A year or two later he heard that she had died; and then that the old man had ordered his little grand-daughter, Yolande, to be sent out to him.

But all this information was incomplete, and excited little interest in Claude. He was of a dreamy and sensitive nature: gentle, brave, disinterested almost to a fault. As a child he had passionately loved his mother, divining in her with his tender insight much unhappiness of which she never spoke; and almost all the bitterness of which he was capable was excited by the recollection of his grandfather's harshness towards her.

At the age of twenty-one, he found himself with no near kinsmen in Europe, and in possession of a small fortune, which enabled him to realise his dream of becoming an artist. From that time his connection, slight enough at all periods, with Australia had gradually ceased. He had never thought of his grandfather as in any way likely to

influence his fate. From the moment of being his own master, he had received no help from him, and he ended at last by hardly remembering the old man's existence.

From this indifference he was abruptly awakened one day, some two months before this story opens, by receiving the news that Mr. John Fairlie was dead, and that, by his latest will, the whole of his fortune devolved on his "only surviving grandson, Claude Maynard."

Of Yolande, not one word.

Sheer bewilderment was the first and strongest feeling excited by this news in the person whom it most concerned. Claude, as has been said, was disinterested to a fault; but, if he cared little for the vulgar advantages of wealth, he was far too high-minded to shirk its responsibilities. He consequently realised at once how profound must be the change that this new wealth would work in his mode of life. New duties lay before him—undreamed-of fields of usefulness—endless chances of relieving that sad misery of his fellow-creatures which so often had made discord in the music of his life. He had to go to Australia, of course; but he fixed his departure for the early days of autumn, and meanwhile proceeded to carry out the programme for his summer which he had decided on while still a man of modest means.

One reason that he had for delaying was interest in the fate of his unknown cousin, Yolande. With the quick imagination of a nature essentially sympathetic, he understood at once that the change which had come over that young girl's life was as great as the alteration in his own. She had been led for several years to regard herself as the old man's heiress, and then a sudden decision, perhaps a tyrannical caprice, had reversed this decree. Claude guessed that there was a mystery; felt that it might cover some act of injustice; and wished that this doubt could be removed before he unconditionally accepted the fortune that had been left to him. He instructed his lawyers to write to Australia for information, and to set on foot inquiries in Europe.

The letter just received told him more than he had yet learned, and by no means diminished his interest in his young cousin.

If that were she whom he had seen in the moonlight, she was unhappy: a fact which even in a total stranger would have stirred Claude Maynard's ready compassion. And many things seemed to point to her identity. The name first of all, so rare, of Yolande; the circumstance that, when agitated and alone, she had spoken to herself in English. Finally, an impression, dimly remembered now, which Claude had received as a child, that his uncle's Italian wife, besides being of alien race and creed, was in some sad, mysterious way different from other people.

He thought it all over, built up a little romance, decided on his course of action, and finally found himself once again, in the late afternoon, on the little grassy piazza in front of the mysterious garden door.

III.

It was opened by the gaunt, lantern-jawed peasant, who stared at him, as before, with an air of mournful surprise. The man had a rake in his hand, and was evidently officiating as gardener.

"I wish to speak to the Signorina Yolande," said Claude. "Here is my card."

The peasant took it. "Wait," said he, and vanished with Claude's card; to reappear in a very few moments and signify to the visitor that he could walk in. The artist followed a casual-looking servant-man through silent, shadowy corridors and lofty rooms, scantily and stiffly furnished, but stately with fading frescoes on their walls, into a sitting-room, so bright and home-like and English-looking, that half the spectres which Claude's imagination had been invoking, vanished like ghosts at cock-crow. A young girl, pale and slender, with sweet, dreamy eyes and a mass of golden hair, was seated at an old-fashioned piano, her fingers still resting on the keys, her head turned expectantly towards the door. She rose instantly on Claude's entrance.

"I am Yolande," she said, and her soft voice matched her lovely face.

"And I," said Claude, "am your cousin, and delighted to think that a chance, as strange as a fairy tale, has brought me to your home."

"A chance!" repeated Yolande. Then added: "But, of course, it was a chance. We have been kept as much strangers to one another as though there were no tie of blood between us."

"That is a state of things which will now cease, I hope," said Claude, kindly. He had been studying her face while she spoke, and knew that his imaginings were not wholly fanciful. If all else that he had divined were false, one sad thing was true—his little cousin was unhappy. She was also far thinner and paler than befitted one so young. Indeed, now that the faint flush, brought by excitement to her cheeks, had vanished, she looked positively wan.

"You live here alone with—your mother?" Claude inquired rather hesitatingly. The shadow of melancholy on her face grew deeper.

"We live with an aunt of mine—the widow of my mother's brother—Signora Eulalia Tanghetti," replied Yolande.

"Three ladies alone in this big villa! That must be lonely for you."

"There is also my cousin, Ruggiero."

"Oh!" Somehow the idea of this Italian cousin was not pleasing to Claude; especially as he detected, or fancied he did, a slight change in Yolande's tone.

"Can I not see your mother?" was his next question.

"She is a great invalid," answered Yolande gently, looking down. Then as Claude remained silent, she added swiftly, as it seemed to

him almost appealingly: "Did you not know it? Have you never heard? That was the reason why I left Australia."

"Tell me all about it," said Claude, with tender kindness.

"I should like to tell you," she began, rather nervously playing with the tassels of her white silken girdle. "He, my grandfather, was kind to me in his way; and he did so much for me that sometimes I wonder whether I ought to have left him. After my father's death, and before I went out to Australia, we lived here with my Aunt Eulalia, and my mother was not so ill then as now. But the change in her was coming on, and Aunt Eulalia, who had all the money and supported us, was very harsh to my mother at times and frightened her. I could not endure to see it," added Yolande, clasping her delicate hands with a movement of suppressed excitement.

She paused a moment, as if to steady her voice, and then went on more rapidly.

"Then my grandfather sent for me, and they came and took me away, leaving her alone here with that cruel woman. They thought of course that a child of ten years old would soon forget. But I did not forget. All those years in Australia, I seemed to have one fixed vision of her—of her and Aunt Eulalia with her cruel ways. One day, at last, I spoke to my grandfather about it. I implored him to let me go home and bring away my mother. He was very angry. I think he was already ill, although I did not understand that then. And old age, as it crept over him, only made him more bitter and stern. He told me that I might leave if I liked, but that it should be never to return. I must choose, he said, between him and my mother ——"

"And you chose her," broke in Claude, his voice trembling with generous emotion. "You left him and gave up everything—the luxury and indulgence that you enjoyed, the large fortune that would have been yours."

He bent forward, and taking his cousin's little hands in his own, held them with a warm pressure, more eloquent than words.

Yolande looked at him with her innocent, steadfast glance. "Yes," she said simply; "I gave it all up. But that was nothing. I do not care for money. Are you his heir? I am glad."

"Yolande!" exclaimed Claude. "You look ill; you are unhappy; you need a friend, I am sure. Trust me, and tell me how I can help you."

"You are very kind, but indeed I do not know what you can do. My future is all settled now. In a few days I shall be married."

"Married!" Claude repeated the word blankly.

"Yes; to my cousin Ruggiero."

"Do you like him?" asked Claude impetuously, some impulse forcing the question out of him before he realised its nature.

"He is very kind to me," replied Yolande, after a scarcely perceptible pause. "And she is very fond of him."

"She?" repeated Maynard inquiringly.

"My mother."

"But surely you suffice for her?"

"Ah, no!" the swift denial came like of pain. "She does not care for me at all. She has never recognised me since the day I came from Australia, three years ago. She is never violent, but sometimes she has days of a terrible melancholy and paroxysms apparently of pain. In these she calls for me, despairingly, unceasingly. I go to her and she does not know me. Sometimes I think my heart will break."

"So all your sacrifices have been useless," said Claude, gently. "That makes you unhappy; I can understand it; but perhaps you brood too much; this villa seems very lonely and silent. Do you see many people?"

"Never anyone but Signor Stanislas, the lawyer. Aunt Eulalia is an invalid. She is dying slowly of some incurable disease. And then she is very poor. This villa belongs to her, but it is all she has, and she could not afford to see any society."

"Then are you marrying to be happier?" questioned Claude, resolute to understand this point if he could.

"I have not thought about that," said Yolande. "Aunt Eulalia supports us. I have told you so. When she dies, Ruggiero will have to do it. And Aunt Eulalia, although she is harsh, which perhaps she cannot help, has been generous to us. What, indeed, should we have done without her? She urges me to marry Ruggiero. She says it is the only return I can make her; and to see us married will give her a few weeks of happiness before she dies."

"So the wedding is to be soon?"

"In three days. The contract is to be signed the day after to-morrow."

Claude was silent, revolving many things. There were points in the story which he could not understand. As he sat thinking, and watching a stray gleam of sunshine that kissed Yolande's graceful golden head and Madonna-like brow, she glanced up at him, and meeting his eyes gave him a pretty, wan little smile.

"I think you disapprove of me," she said, with her strange simplicity.

"I disapprove of your feeding the monster Time with the premature offering of your health and hope and youth," said Claude. "You have undertaken a task beyond your strength, my little cousin. You should leave self-immolation to the middle-aged and disappointed ones of the world. They have no other gifts to bring."

An inspired look came into Yolande's eyes—lovely, plaintive eyes, marked with unnatural black circles of watching and care.

"And love?" she said softly. "Does that count for nothing in your

philosophy? To me it seems that the best of our years, the very flower of youth, is still too little to be spent in its service."

Again Claude possessed himself of his cousin's hands; but this time it was to kiss them reverently.

"You have the spirit of a martyr," he said with grave playfulness. "But you must not quarrel with those who seek to save you from the stake. Don't look alarmed. You shall be allowed to sacrifice yourself, if you like, only I shall take care that it is in some adequate cause."

"Are you going?" said Yolande regretfully, as he rose.

"Yes; but you will see me again soon. Perhaps to-morrow. At any rate I shall be present at the signing of your contract."

He smiled as he said this, but rather grimly, and his own words hurt him, even as he uttered them.

Half-an-hour later he was in the city, hunting up a lawyer of his acquaintance.

"Signor Stanislas," Yolande had mentioned as her aunt's man of business. It was only a Christian name, and not much of an indication, but it was enough. In Italian towns everyone of a certain position knows all about everyone else: and especially does one lawyer know everything about other lawyers. Hardly had Claude mentioned Signor Stanislas, Aunt Eulalia, the villa, and the impending marriage contract, before Signor Bartolommeo Morelli knew with what he had to deal. A shrewd little man, he raised his eyebrows significantly several times during Claude's narration, but was too cautious to commit himself prematurely.

"*Vedremo!* we shall see," he murmured. "You will give any sum to fathom the secret of all this, you say—for you think there is a secret. And the information must be obtained at once, before this time to-morrow—at latest before sundown on the day after, that is Thursday—uhm—uhm—*Pazzi questi Inglesi*—well, we will see. The time is short; but call again to-morrow."

Needless to say Claude was punctual at the appointment, but Signor Bartolommeo was out. And all day he remained invisible, during which period Maynard felt himself consumed with suspense. A fortnight previously he first knew that Yolande existed; twenty-four hours earlier he had never exchanged a word with her; and now Yolande filled his life. Like all men of natures sensitive and intense, but fundamentally simple, Claude had never frittered away his feelings in passing flirtations. With him, consequently, to love at last was to love suddenly and for ever.

Signor Bartolommeo's office was hardly open on the fateful Thursday, when Maynard appeared in it. The little lawyer's eyes twinkled with mingled satisfaction and amusement. Everything which could most gratify a lawyer's heart at this moment was his.

"A conspiracy? Yes, certainly, there was a conspiracy to deceive the young girl," he said. "Very sharp the Signora Eulalia—*Per Bacco*

—a woman not born yesterday, by any means. For the rest, poor, and dying, and passionately devoted to her only son as she was, her conduct admitted of explanation. Naturally she wished the young lady's fortune in the family."

"A fortune? But my cousin is penniless—disinherited of the last shilling," exclaimed Claude.

The lawyer urbanely corrected him.

"That was not altogether the case. Disinherited, it is true, she had been by her English grandfather; but not by her Italian relatives. Certainly the fortune she would come into at the age of twenty-one was modest compared with Australian millions, but it sufficed—it sufficed. The Signora Eulalia would be glad of it for the young Ruggiero, who was a spendthrift—rather wild."

In answer to his client's impatient questioning, the little lawyer then proceeded to relate that Maddalena, Yolande's mother, had an uncle, the last of his name, who was childless, and whose patrimony had been a source of speculation to many.

The astute Signora Eulalia, his nephew's widow, had paid patient court to him, hoping for favours for her son by another marriage, Ruggiero. She had been glad to send Yolande to Australia, fearing that the child's grace and beauty might prove dangerous to her own plans. But all her scheming came to naught, for when the uncle died, it was found that he, who had been most unfeeling towards poor Maddalena during his life, had yet left the better part of his fortune to Maddalena's daughter, then on her way back to Europe. Signora Eulalia, however, had shown herself equal to the occasion. She kept the knowledge of Yolande's inheritance from her, and immured her in that dismal old villa, with the sole object of bringing about a marriage between her and Ruggiero.

"And was there no one to enlighten her? No executor—no trustee?" asked Claude indignantly.

Signor Bartolommeo gave a kind of soft purr, like a comfortable tabby at the sight of a saucerful of milk.

"Certainly, there was an executrix—Signora Eulalia; and a trustee—Signor Stanislas; but—what would you?—they played into one another's hands. The world, *caro signore*, is full of such baseness."

"But this very day, when the contract is read, surely Yolande will have to be enlightened!" exclaimed Claude.

"True," assented the little lawyer. "True, and Signora Eulalia must feel slightly uneasy. But it would be late for the young girl to draw back. Doubtless, her aunt counts on that. And then there is Ruggiero to plead his own cause—*Eh!* a handsome youth like that is very persuasive."

And Signor Bartolommeo briskly rubbed his chin.

Claude sprang to his feet in a white heat of anger—anger and another feeling, keener still. "Then this Ruggiero, of course, is a willing party to the fraud?"

"*Masicaro!* Not a doubt of it. He is a sadly dissipated youth: a gambler, and worse."

Good heavens! And it was to him that they meant to give Yolande!

Claude, at the thought, felt inclined to poignard everybody; Signor Bartolommeo, with his purring philosophy, among the number. So he hurried away from the office, and up to the villa, every pulse in him throbbing with the desire to see and warn Yolande.

But he was destined to disappointment. The Signorina was out, the servant assured him, and would not be back until late in the afternoon. The Signora Eulalia had accompanied her, and there was nobody at home but the Signora Maddalena, whom nobody ever saw.

Claude produced a napoleon, and slipping it into the man's hand, asked at what hour the contract was to be signed; learnt that the time fixed was five o'clock, and departed to get through the interminable space of waiting as best he could. Never in all his life had hours seemed more leaden-winged. But they went over at last, and at half-past four Claude again mounted the avenue leading to the villa, armed with a note, in which he had written a passionate appeal to Yolande to see him. The servant, transformed by the gift of the morning into an ardent friend, received him with a long face.

"The contract is being read. The Signora Eulalia hurried it on. They are all in the big saloon," he whispered, and eagerly led the way.

To the big saloon, winged by impatience, Claude hastened, and just as he crossed the threshold, heard a monotonous legal voice reading the statement of the bride elect's dower. He glanced hastily round; saw the lawyer, the two witnesses, Yolande, looking pale and startled, and the Signora Eulalia haggard with an anxiety which turned to rage as she perceived the intruder. Near her was seated Ruggiero, a slender, handsome, depraved-looking youth; and a little in the background, glancing round with a vague, pleased curiosity—the curiosity of Ophelia—was poor Maddalena.

Claude, his heart beating almost to bursting, his face set and stern, hurriedly approached Yolande. But before he could reach her, he felt a light touch on the arm, and turning saw Maddalena, who was looking up at him with a childlike smile.

"Ah! you have returned at last," she said, in her vague, sweet voice. "And where is she—where is Yolande?"

"There!" cried Claude passionately, and pointed towards the pallid little bride. There was a pause: a sort of sob of suspense among the spectators, stirred, they hardly knew why, by Claude's dramatic action. Then Maddalena shrank back a pace or two, with a gesture half-bewildered, half-dismayed, but fixed a troubled glance on her child.

Claude brushed past her. He went up to Yolande, and laid a firm, tender grasp on her slim wrist.

"You have heard," he cried in English, his tones vibrating with excitement. "You are rich. They have deceived you. Will you be made their tool? Yolande, cease to throw away your youth for a figment, and to waste your untried powers of love and hope. Cease to fight with shadows."

She looked at him with dilating eyes, while slowly her imprisoned spirit caught the infection of his fervour. Some mingled impulse seemed to stir in her; a longing unknown until then for happiness; a sense of forgotten, but still achievable desires.

While yet she stood irresolute, listening half-unconsciously to the faint, far-off clarion of that oncoming spring, a hand whose touch had been long foregone was laid upon her neck.

Maddalena, stirred heaven knows to what dim recognition by Claude's ardent words, had crept silently and unnoticed to her daughter's side, and now stood looking at her with a wistful expression of re-awakening love, still half-perplexed and doubtful.

Yolande gave a little cry, and stretched out her arms to her mother. But even as she did so, a veil gathered over her eyes, and, worn out with the sudden rush of new emotions, she fell swooning at Maddalena's feet.

There was no more talk of the marriage contract for that day; and when Yolande was sufficiently recovered to listen to Ruggiero's pleading, she showed herself more insensible to it than he had expected in one so gentle. In vain he protested that her wealth had taken him as much by surprise as it did herself. In vain the Signora Eulalia went down on her knees and passionately appealed for compassion in the name of her age and her broken health.

Yolande was kind: more, she showed herself generous: but she remained absolutely cold. The morbid life she had led for three years past rolled away from her like a nightmare, and in that new daylight of the soul where she stood now, things appeared to her as they really were; and no prayers on Ruggiero's part could disguise from her his essential depravity.

Maddalena, too, had entered on a new phase. Her mind was clearer, and at moments she seemed to know her child. At any rate, she now no longer shrank from her, and to Claude she showed herself pathetically submissive. But this change in her mental condition was, as often happens, the precursor of bodily decay. She died a few months after her removal from the villa, and for one brief instant before her eyes closed on the world she fully recognised and blessed Yolande.

Needless to say that Claude then married the little cousin whose delicate spirit he had freed from bondage, as Prospero released Ariel from the cloven pine; and on whose fair face he would never have looked but for the strange chance that sent him wandering through the olive-orchards one moonlit summer night.

DOWN TO OUR TOWN.

The child speaks—

"Eh, but it's wonderful down to our town!
Mother once sent me to stop for a bit;
After the whooping-cough, old Mrs. Brown
Had me to stay at her shop in the Split.
That's where the Ferry goes over and back.
Sometimes I served at the counter, you know,
Weighed out the sugar and helped her to pack
Saturday's parcels, all set in a row.
Ah, you should see all the things in the shop!
Now that I'm back with the cows on the down,
Sometimes I long for a doll or a top—
Eh, but it's wonderful, down to our town!"

The girl speaks—

"Eh, but it's beautiful down to our town!
Mother just lets us go once in a way;
Out on the quay where the river runs down,
The wind tastes so salt, though it's miles to the bay.
There go the ladies so tripping and smart,
Flowers to their bonnets and heels to their shoes—
If father 'd but put the old mare in the cart,
We'd drive into market whenever we choose!
Only—he's careful is father—and so,
Just speak to a sailor, he'll grumble and frown;
'Cows in to milking!'—here, mother, I'll go—
Eh, but it's beautiful down to our town!"

The mother speaks—

"Eh, but it's terrible down to our town!
My man's two sisters they've told me a lot;
Fighting and drinking each night at the 'Crown,'
One stabbed another—they show'd me the spot.
Hard by the Ferry-split, two of the lads
Quarrelled along of a girl, so they say—
Father he's wise, though he's hard with his fads,
Keeping the children right out of the way.
Sometimes it's dull for the girls as they grow,
Only the cows and the sheep on the down—
But if you'd heard—and you knew what I know—
Eh, but it's terrible down to our town!"

G. B. Stuart.

A WEEK ON THE NORFOLK BROADS.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Letters from Majorca."

Moonlight on the Broads.

IT was the loveliest June weather imaginable, and we suddenly made up our minds to spend a week on the Norfolk Broads. Everyone had said so much about the Broads. They were unique, as far as England was concerned. Our island had nothing like them. We should enjoy a very novel experience, and return home, even after a week, like giants refreshed.

This might be true of one of us, as far as the "refresher" was concerned, though the giant comparison was humiliating to a sensitive temperament. But to J. R., who spends more of his time afloat than on shore: whose favourite song is *A Life on the Ocean Wave;* whose happiness consists in flirting with every pretty girl at every port to which duty calls him: a week on the Norfolk Broads, he declared, was likely to prove an experience relaxing rather than the opposite. However, J. R. has, at all times, the physical proportions and muscular development of the afore-named giants; and a little relaxation of his superfluous energies would be rather good for him on the whole: just as, in the old days, bleeding was supposed to be a sovereign and discreet remedy for apoplexy.

Even Dr. T. (Dr. by right of LL.D., not M.D.), who has been half over the world in his yacht, and has done the Norfolk Broads times out of number, said that we could not possibly spend a week to greater advantage, or more agreeably. Dr. T. is one of those rare men who inspire you with absolute confidence. You never, for a moment, doubt his opinions and assertions. In following his advice, you feel that you cannot go wrong. He is always himself, and always the same. I repeat that such men are rare; at any rate, I find them so. I am constantly being thrown back upon myself, even by those I most rely upon, by discovering that the opinions they express one week will be directly contradicted by their opinions of the next.

We no longer hesitated. No sooner said than done. I knew

J. R. too well to give him time to change his mind. Bosom friends and close companions, still I am conscious of his weaknesses. One of these is an inveterate, carefully-cherished laziness. If we go abroad together, he will never stir hand or foot to see the wonders of the passing world, unless, metaphorically speaking, I hold the rod of correction over him : and he had so much of this as a boy, that he dreads it as a man. Spare the rod, and spoil the child—it is indeed a wonder that he hasn't grown up perfect, and only proves that the rod does sometimes fail in its application.

Another weakness is, that if he undertakes to start on an expedition one day, he will utterly ignore his promise the next. The weathercock of his mind has changed from South to North, or from West to East, and he is not to be moved. You will ask me of his virtues? Upon these I cannot enlarge. They would fill a volume, and I have only a few pages at command.

It is impossible to do anything like all the Broads in a week, and we therefore had to choose our route. At present we did little more than decide upon our starting point. For the rest we must be guided by circumstances, and the experience of those who knew more about them than we did.

I telegraphed to Oulton, near Lowestoft, to the landlord of the inn, and ascertained that a small yacht, excellent and comfortable, could be placed at our disposal. She was said to be a fifteen-ton yacht, but, when we saw her, we decided that she approached much nearer to twenty. As there were only two of us, she was really larger than we needed, and would have comfortably held four instead of two. The smaller the craft the better for the Broads. She requires less wind to drive her along; and, when there is no wind at all, and the men have to take to the poles, every additional ton is so much extra work for them.

It was a most lovely morning when we left London. J. R., for once, had behaved well, and kept his engagement. I felt that we were starting under the most favourable conditions. J. R., more at home on the water than on shore, was the very man for such an expedition. We left town in that perfect contentment which, whilst it lasts, makes earth a paradise.

If you are not already informed, you will probably ask, What are the Broads? that is if, like Miss Rosa Dartle, you are gifted with an inquiring mind and love to put questions for the sake of information.

The Norfolk Broads, then, I believe it is generally admitted, are sundry large sheets of water, immense ponds or small lakes, connected together by the rivers of Norfolk and Suffolk. They are rushy and reedy and marshy : here shallow, there deep ; plentifully stocked with fish within the waters and birds above and about them. Heron, snipe, wild fowl, these afford excellent sport to those who have obtained permission to shoot them.

For our own part we went neither to shoot nor fish, but to be lazy ;

to indulge ourselves in the rare and well-earned luxury of idleness; to bask in sunshine and lie upon deck; to listen to the soothing ripple of the water, the rustling and sighing of the reeds; the plash of the fish, the cry of the wild birds; to refresh the eye with the verdant tones of the banks on either side, and the stretches of green country beyond. Not the "green hills far away," for Norfolk is flat; especially so in the neighbourhood of the Broads. In short, we went to take life easily; the luxurious dolce-far-niente which is so exquisite a sensation; listening for the moment to the voice of the charmer, even though he charm not wisely; throwing all care, all skeletons, to the wind; abandoning oneself for a brief space to the bliss of a fools' paradise; putting away from one's consciousness the fact that this also must pass away, and Black Monday must come to us all in this work-a-day world. Yet it is our Black

ON THE WAVENEY.

Mondays and our work which give us the exquisite enjoyment of our holidays. And work, after all, is pleasure; successful work, undoubtedly the only really happy life on earth.

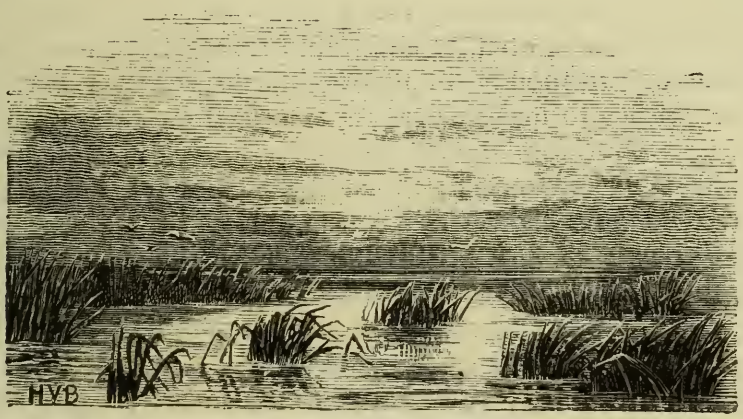
Finally, we went with the intention of revelling in a week's uninterrupted companionship, not enjoyed for so long that we began to wonder if our friendship needed repair: that friendship which, as Shelley says, is all too rare.

And first of all, we began like children. J. R., who happened to have an old navy cap with him, passed it over to me, and took summary possession of my cool and comfortable straw. Henceforth I was taken for the naval officer and he for the landsman. But on the Norfolk Broads it was of no consequence, as Mr. Toots would have said. We were exclusive, and kept ourselves to ourselves. The men on board were of the very few with whom we exchanged words: I cannot say ideas, for they had none beyond eating and drinking, cooking, sleeping, sailing, and taking life generally as easily as possible. But on the whole they were capital

men, civil and obliging, and always ready to lay in a large stock of provisions at every port we touched at.

We reached Oulton in high spirits, ready to accept all the good that came in our way. The sun shone hotly, the sky was blue and cloudless. It was perfect weather: and when weather is perfect in England it is unrivalled. But it is so rare, that when found, as Captain Cuttle says, it must be noted. This is the third time, however, that I have quoted Dickens, and I must be careful not to do so again, or the reader may imagine that my researches in the fields of literature have been limited.

In a few moments we had reached the inn and interviewed the landlord. He pointed out the yacht, and told us she was called the *Mockingbird*. Our crew, two in number, were presented to us, ducked their heads, pulled their hair, and otherwise behaved themselves after the fashion of their kind. They looked right decent men



OULTON BROAD.

and when put through their facings, came out of the examination very creditably. We assured them that if they proved themselves good men and true, they would find us excellent masters. Thus a good understanding was entered upon at the very beginning, and was kept up to the end.

We had hired the yacht for one week. From Wednesday at noon until the following Tuesday, observed the landlord. We told him that in our world this was not considered a week. The yacht was ours from Wednesday to Wednesday. The landlord objected. There couldn't be two Wednesdays in one week any more than two Sundays: and on the Broads they reckoned from Wednesday till Tuesday. We returned that though his waters might be broad, his ideas were narrow. We couldn't subscribe to them. Upon which, he said that we were gentlemen and of course knew much more than he did, and he was happy to be corrected of his error. The yacht should be ours from Wednesday to Wednesday. He gave in very nicely and satisfactorily, and we parted excellent friends.

Before starting, we laid in a stock of provisions, including a supply of bottled beer. We thought it more than enough to last the week, but it was all gone at the end of two days. We had brought down with us a cargo of tinned meats for dinner, and potted pastes and Cambridge sausages for breakfast: and I may as well state at once that we completely ruined our digestions for six months afterwards by our devotion to these potted poisons. They are as insidious as dram-drinking, but of course in a different way.

All nature smiled upon us that afternoon when we found ourselves on board the yacht, kings of our castle, monarchs of all we surveyed; in command of an army—perhaps I ought to say navy—of two, and with no sign of mutiny in the camp—perhaps it would be more correct to say on deck. Everything, after all, is a matter of comparison; the world is but a word; and there is just as much pleasure, sense of power and responsibility, in commanding two, as in commanding two thousand, if you can only think so. And, without controversy, it is certainly very much less trouble. Ask any lady in the land, for instance, whether she would rather have the ordering of two servants or two thousand; unless, indeed, she has become tired of life and wishes to make a rapid passage from this world to the next.

A soft breeze was blowing; the sun flashed upon the waters; the waters were as blue as the sky. They were broad and beautiful. Broad they ought to be, for this was Oulton Broad; one of the prettiest, though not one of the largest of the Broads. It was full of fish, the men told us; but we had not come to fish; or to do anything useful, even in the way of sport.

There was much craft upon the Broad, but nothing, we thought, prettier than the *Mockingbird*, if as pretty. We congratulated ourselves upon our amount of room: a couple of cabins; one for living, one for sleeping; an excellent deck on which to lie and lounge; a "fo'cs'le" for the men. We did not then realise that a smaller craft would have answered our purpose, and been less trouble to manage. That only came with reflection and experience; the first time we found ourselves becalmed.

If you are a large party, you take a wherry instead of a yacht; and there is no doubt that, under the conditions of fair weather and goodly company, many days may thus be passed on the Norfolk Broads with intense enjoyment. These wherries are very picturesque. They very much resemble those barges that may be seen going up and down the Thames; excepting that one is laid out for cargo, the other fitted up for passengers. One advantage of the Norfolk Broads is, that though upon the water you are never in rough water. The terrors of seasickness cannot affect even the most sensitive upon the point.

Our sail was hoisted that Wednesday afternoon, and, figuratively speaking, we felt the water moving beneath us. It rippled against the sides of the vessel, and flashed in our wake, and the breeze

wafted us along with a delicious sense of wings. We were fairly under way.

Our first destination was to be Beccles. We thought we should like to see the old town, and this would be our only opportunity.

Soon the water narrowed, and from Oulton Broad we found ourselves launching into Oulton Dyke, which gives place in turn to the River Waveney.

The narrower waters were the pleasanter. The reeds and rushes on either side bent to our progress and whispered and murmured; and we looked out for Pan, and though we did not see him, we thought we heard his music. The whispering of the reeds, at any rate, charmed us. J. R. regretted that he hadn't brought his flute with him, that he might have held duets with the reeds. I am not sure that I shared his sorrow. The solos undoubtedly charmed; it was not so certain that the duets would have done so.

The country on either side was very flat, and I cannot say that it was very pretty; but there was a tone about it which delighted the eye and pleased the senses. Occasionally we would see a wherry bearing down upon us, with a merry party on board, which yet somehow or other made us rejoice in the intense repose of our small and select company of two. It was half the charm.

And a charm the whole thing undoubtedly was. It was a new experience. Familiar as we both were with the water, oft-times as we had cruised about together, we yet felt in a new world. We had the waters very much to ourselves. June is rather early for the Norfolk Broads; but we did not at all object to this. On meeting a yacht or wherry, it was sometimes difficult to pass each other in some of the narrower parts of the rivers. It was yet more difficult sometimes when a craft, swifter than we, overtook us, and passed onwards. Yet these small incidents gave a little animation to what was certainly in general the very impersonation of still waters: still life altogether; for the far-stretching flats on either side seemed almost unpopulated, and presented few features of interest for the eye to rest upon. Windmills rose up not seldom, and, of course, were picturesque and characteristic, as windmills always are. Whoever invented them was a benefactor to mankind. Church steeples and spires also occasionally met the eye, for Norfolk is famous for the abundance and beauty of its ecclesiastical architecture. Here, a round tower, so rarely met with elsewhere, is now and then seen: something like the round towers I found in Bornholm, that paradise of the Baltic; though it is, perhaps, going somewhat far afield for a comparison.

We did not reach Beccles that first night, but halted midway in the river Waveney.

It was a charming halting-place too. On one side were flats and fields, green and far-stretching. Here, close to the bank, we made fast for the night. We were amongst the reeds and rushes; and the swirl of the water and the murmur of the breeze as it took them and

swayed them until they seemed gifted with animation, simply plunged one in Arcadia. A lark flew skywards, as we made fast. If it was not Shelley's lark it might have been, ever singing as it soared. Ah, what rapture these simple sights and sounds of nature give us! Not the sweetest music ever composed, or the finest poem ever written, can so speak to the soul. Shelley's skylark may stir the heart, but the lark itself goes deeper. The one, after all, is the inspiration of man, the other is from the hand of God. And mortals can only imperfectly express thought and emotion. Their best and deepest flies from them, and dissolves itself into essence before it can be recorded.

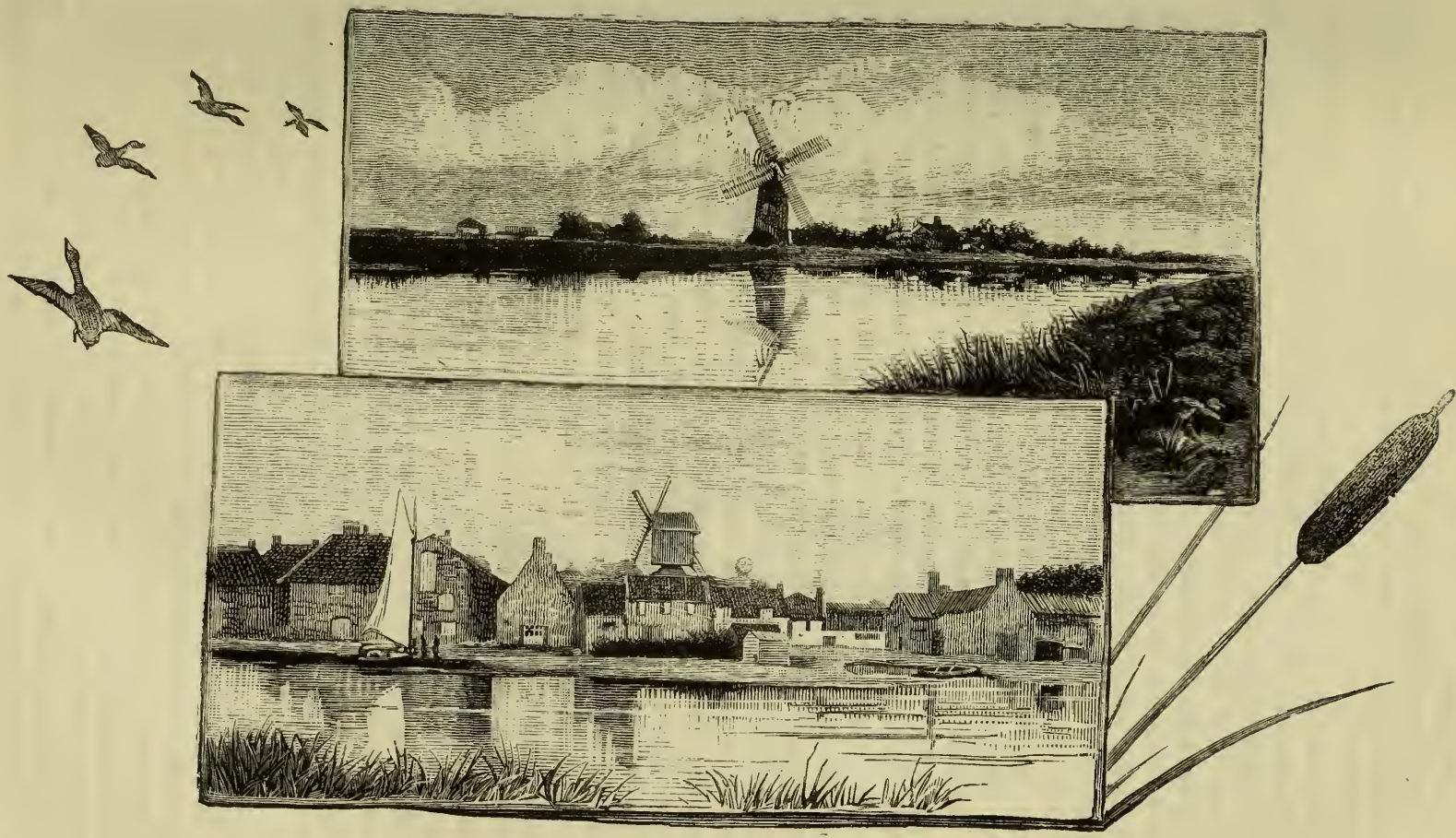
Opposite our moorings was a village, and positively a hill. Mischievous boys were teasing each other, racing and shouting; enjoying that season of childhood and youth, which one finds in after life was happier than we thought it, and passes all too briefly.

We decided to land for a stroll, but first instructed the men to prepare dinner. Our wants had to be few and modest. Our porcelain and our silver were limited.

Nor was that all. Our cooking apparatus was confined to a saucepan and a frying-pan. The first evening we were somewhat lordly in our ideas, and ordered fish and cutlets. Our chief mate (J. R. dubbed himself skipper, and had the impertinence to degrade me to the office of cabin-boy) declared that he was also a first-rate cook. Possibly he might have been under certain conditions, but he could not make bricks without straw any more than the Israelites of old. We found everything done to perfection; only that the cutlets took their turn in the frying-pan after the soles, and were so frightfully fishy in consequence that the first mouthful almost invalided us for the rest of the journey. Fortunately for the old proverb, nothing was wasted. The men were less fastidious than their masters; and the fishy cutlets made high festival for'ard.

But this is anticipating, for before dinner we were punted across and landed at the v llage.

It was very rural, very picturesque, very out-of-the-way and out of the world, very dull and desolate. It consisted of a long street with a windmill at one end and a church at the other. We met a few rustics and stopped and spoke to them, chiefly for the sake of hearing their accent. Of course, according to Norfolk custom, they all talked in that sing-song tone which is so very singular—and so very irritating. We wanted the Post-Office, and found it at last in a most impossible place, away from the village and surrounded by fields. The worthy people who kept it were as stupid as owls and as sleepy, and blinked at us as if, like the beauty in the wood, they had just awakened from a hundred years' sleep. But there was no beauty about them: and when we asked if letters then posted would be delivered in London the next morning, they replied vacantly that "m'appen they would, and m'appen they wouldn't."



ON THE BROADS.

J. R. felt irritated, and addressed the man as if he were paying him a compliment.

"That's very satisfactory," said he. "Pray, sir, would you rather look a greater fool than you are, or be a greater fool than you look?"

Whatever else the man looked, he looked puzzled. After thoughtfully considering the matter, he replied:

"That there question sounds very much like 'rithmetic, and I never were good at sums. Besides that, sir, I don't see in what way it has to do with the Post-Office, and so it can't concern me."

"The schoolmaster seems very much abroad in Norfolk," said J. R. as we left the Post-Office, laughing, crossed the fields, and went back to the river.

There the *Mockingbird*, taut and trim, was safely moored, the picture of rest and contentment. The sun was declining; the broad light of day had sensibly diminished. Rosy clouds had risen and flecked the west, and the sunset presently grew gorgeous and promising. It was a magnificent evening. The lark still sang, as if he knew how much he was being appreciated. Twilight crept over the face of nature, with its solemn influence. Mystery seemed to haunt the rustling and whispering of the reeds by the river, and Pan's piping changed from the major to the minor key.

As darkness fell, something besides mystery crept up also—a cold, damp mist, so much in contrast with the atmosphere before sundown, that the change was startling. We could now have done with a roaring fire, but fire was not to be had. This damp night air seems rather a feature of the Broads, and is only what one ought to expect in marshy districts: but to certain temperaments and constitutions, there is no doubt it would be dangerous enough to make them a forbidden pleasure.

Later on, when the stars were out, and the sky was solemn and scintillating, we were glad to turn in, roll ourselves in our blankets, and sleep the sleep of the just.

We were up early next morning. The sun had risen in glorious array. There was still a chilly feeling in the air, and a slight mist was doing its best to disappear from the face of nature. The church and windmill upon the hill wore a thin veiling, and looked picturesque and romantic. The mischievous boys were, no doubt, slumbering as only boys know how. And we prepared to go up stream again.

The men had landed for milk, and, early though it was, they found it: milk and new-laid eggs. We should have breakfasted as Adam and Eve might have done in Eden, had we been satisfied with such wholesome faring; but we must needs go in also for our potted poisons: with a daily devotion which ended only when we had finished them up, and they in revenge had very nearly finished us up. That is two years ago now, but I have forsworn potted poisons ever since.

As we loosed our moorings, that exquisite lark flew up with a parting song. Nothing would persuade us that it was not meant for us, and for us alone. Its sound followed us far up the stream. The reeds bent and bowed to our progress; the air grew warm and luxurious, the sky once more was without a cloud.

Presently we came to a bridge which had to be opened, and for which toll had to be paid. A man let down a long pole with a net at the end, into which a coin was dropped; and then, and then only, we were allowed to pass through. Not a moment's trust was given. I don't know whether this argues undue suspicion on the part of the men, or a certain moral obliquity on the part of those who usually frequent the Broads. The next bridge to be opened was the railway bridge at Beccles. We had to wait some time until a train had passed, and then the monstrous thing moved round for us. Here no toll was exacted, and we threw the men a shilling to reward them for their trouble. Instead of catching it, they allowed it to roll on to the bridge, running after it as one has seen a cat run after a mouse. Alas, the mouse sometimes escapes down a hole, and the shilling did likewise; and from the men's expression you would have thought they had lost a kingdom. Was it possible to do anything but throw them another shilling?

Soon after this, we found ourselves at Beccles, and made fast. We gave the men sundry commissariat commissions, which it was always their delight to execute, and then went up into the town.

It possesses no special attraction, beyond its fine old church and detached tower. It was not market day, or any other red-letter day, and I don't think we met ten people in the streets during our peregrinations. The very shops were sleepy, and J. R. wandered hopelessly about in search of a supply of his favourite tobacco. It was not to be discovered. But as he had an unlimited quantity of it on board, it really was of no moment: and we should presently find ourselves at Norwich, where no doubt everything in the tobacco line existed. We here laid in a fresh stock of porcelain: the cups and saucers on board the *Mockingbird* were not sufficiently refined for our fastidious tastes. These we afterwards presented to our chief mate, who, being a married man and a martyr, was ready for all such additions to his domestic establishment.

We went back down the hill, past cottages where roses bloomed—June roses, so sweet and welcome—and soon found ourselves on board again. The men had executed their commissions; we handed them our large packet of porcelain, which we had ourselves carried in defiance of the startled birds of the air and the fashionable world of Beccles; and prepared to set sail.

Our destination was Great Yarmouth; and although we had a long journey before us, we had also a long day. Moreover, wind and tide would be in our favour, and we had every reason to anticipate a delightful sail.

It proved so. The day was hot and glowing. We had nothing to do but to lie and lounge on deck, and enjoy this being wafted along by the white wings of our sails. Nothing to do but luxuriate in the ripple of the water, as the *Mockingbird* cut through it. The reeds by the river always added to the charm of our progress; it was so pastoral, so deliciously countrified, so out of the world. Distant villages occasionally diversified the landscape. The country was always flat, sometimes very marshy. The cattle would come down and stare at us. Cows with their great sleepy, inquiring eyes; and sheep that were just as stupid-looking as sheep always are, and jumped over the shadows cast by the trees as if they were horizontal bars put there for gymnastic purposes. Horses trotted about with their long tails, sniffing the air, enjoying their freedom. Just as we were enjoying our freedom. What a change it all was, this country scene, these sights and sounds, from the crowded streets of London, where people jostle each other, and fashionable loungers throng the Park, and equipages never cease to come and go. What a still greater change for anyone coming from the busy haunts of our provincial towns: grimy Birmingham or rainy Manchester—our black countries and our manufacturing districts.

Presently, at St. Olive's, we passed out of the Waveney into the New Cut: a long piece of water or canal, which has been made to connect the Waveney with the Yare. It was a beautiful bit of engineering, and we came out presently near Reedham, close to a swing bridge. On the right side of the bridge: for we turned from it on our way to Yarmouth.

We were now in the river Yare, from which Yarmouth takes its name. Between this and the old town, it winds and twists about, so that sometimes we found we had the breeze with us, and, occasionally, for a short time ahead of us. Here the land was very marshy, and the reeds by the river rustled and whispered more than ever. An occasional heron rested on one leg in the marshes, grey and dignified, its reflection cast upon the waters; reminding one of the storks one sees in Germany and in Holland, who build their nests on the chimneys of the one, and revel in the low pastures of the other.

We presently found ourselves in Breydon water. It looks like an endless extent of flooded fields, so shallow that gates and bushes uprear their heads. The water rises and falls with the tide that flows in and out of Gorleston Harbour and makes the port of Yarmouth. When the tide is out this picturesque Breydon water is nothing but a long, flat, melancholy expanse of mud.

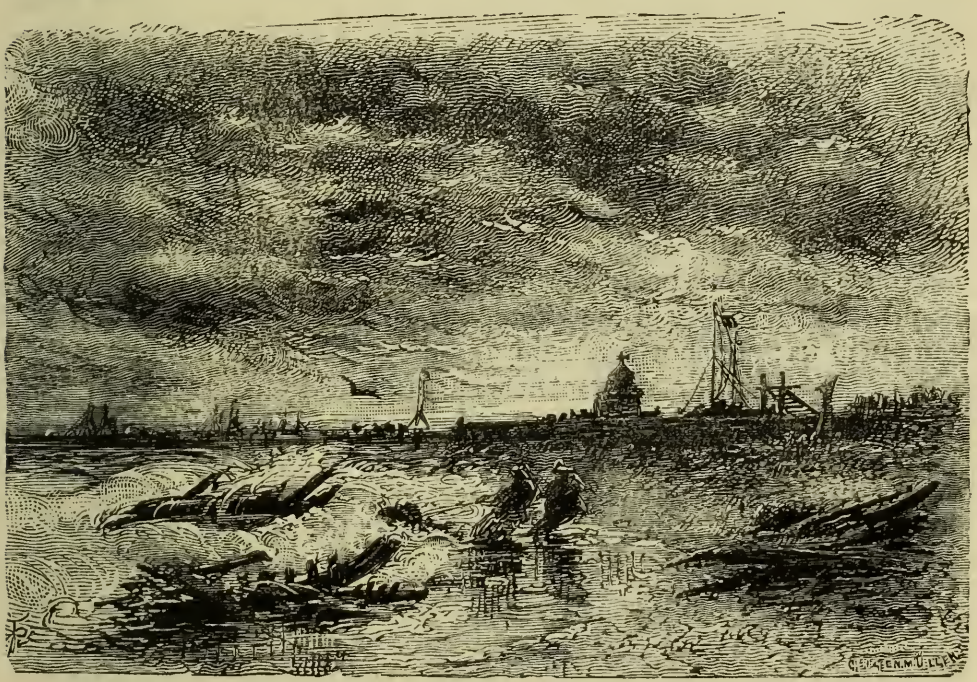
Here the men had to navigate with care. A foot to right or left, and it seemed that we should be stranded. Posts marked our way and guided us towards our destination. Yarmouth in the distance looked quaint and picturesque; as it is in fact.

We sailed up to the town. The fine old tower of St. Nicholas,

the largest parish church in England—and the most uncomfortable—reared its head proudly above the houses. The colouring of these houses and their architecture very much impressed us. The place looked more foreign than English.

We found moorings alongside the quay; not without some little trouble, for the place seemed full of craft; small yachts, wherries and barges: and larger vessels that would presently pass through the bridge, be towed down the long harbour ending at Gorleston, and so put out to sea.

We were a long way from the bridge, and had quite a quarter of a mile's walk after landing, before reaching the central thoroughfares of Yarmouth.



GORLESTON HARBOUR.

We had now a longer journey before us, and on land; a longer journey with a great pleasure at the end of it. Nothing less than a visit to our dear old Rector, who has not his rival in the world; and his cara sposa, who has not hers; and THOSE DREADFUL GIRLS, who have not theirs. How they came to be called THOSE DREADFUL GIRLS, time will show. Names, like other things, often go by contraries; and if, in print, we called these dreadful girls by the endearing epithets they hold in our hearts, our cheeks would blush and our hands would tremble from henceforth and for ever. They had no idea that we were near them; no idea that we were spending a week on the Broads, and that one of our pleasantest thoughts had been the surprise we should give them, the visit we should pay them, the delight we should have in being with them. For the

Rector alone is one of those men who stand a head and shoulders above other men in all manner and matter of conversation, and in depth and variety of learning.

We arrived in due time, and entered unannounced. The Rector started out of a nap he was enjoying in his luxurious chair; Mrs. Rector, with an exclamation, dismissed the six cats she was nursing, with a want of ceremony they had never before experienced; the girls, after a pause of astonishment, figuratively flew into our arms. I felt a little jealous of J. R., who always endeavours to outrival me, and sometimes succeeds. He tried his best in this instance, as usual, and after he had returned to town, sent them down a full-length, life-size photograph of himself, which the girls insisted upon having in their boudoir, and which could only be got in through the first floor window.

But it is not of the pleasant hours we spent with them that I have to write. They came to an end all too soon, after the manner of all pleasures and delights.

When we bade them farewell, the stars were out and darkness had long fallen. But we had made an engagement for the next day. The girls had graciously consented to accompany us to Norwich, and promised to be on board by nine o'clock the next morning. We should reach Norwich in the afternoon, where they would have a few hours with us: we should remain, and they would return home by the evening train. The arrangement was perfect.

"You consent, of course?" I said, turning to Mrs. Rector. Mr. Rector, like all good men and true, who have good wives and true, is the echo of his cara sposa.

"I would trust them with you all over the world; amongst the wild tribes of Princess Pocohontas, who was my ancestress, or on Robinson Crusoe's Island," replied Mrs. Rector. "But there is that slight look of instability about J. R. common to most sailors, and I should not trust them with *him* if you were not there."

J. R. made a polite bow. He took it as a compliment. He is a terrible lady-killer; frightfully vain; and breaks more hearts in a year than most men do in a lifetime.

Arrived at Great Yarmouth, we crossed the road by the drawbridge, and went down the narrow turnings that led to the yacht. We lost our way half-a-dozen times in this mazy district, but at length had the felicity of seeing our craft moored upon the still waters.

The small hours of the night had begun to strike. Everything was calm and quiet. The men, like the fowls, had gone to roost. Alongside, in and out of the stonework, hundreds of rats were frisking and gambolling in the security of the hour. We might easily have despatched a score; but in the solemn, almost holy stillness of the night, and in our present passing happiness, we spared them.

Punctually at nine o'clock the next morning, E. and F. made their appearance; and very soon after, we were under sail.

The sun shone hotly upon Breydon water, stretching far and wide. A picturesque sight was this immense sheet of shallow water. It looked for all the world as if huge dykes and sluices had been opened and the floods let loose. This gave it a strangely desolate appearance, as though wreck and ruin had been wrought around. Houses might have been swamped, lives lost. Everything was reflected upon its surface, smooth and calm as a mirror. Sea-gulls flew about in numbers, screaming with that wild clang which thrills one through and through, and is so suggestive of rocks and freedom and all the enchanting life one meets up in the North seas, where the wild birds build their nests. Herons—the country people call them Hernseys —perched upon one leg, and now and then took wing and flew right across our track, in defiance of all heronly habits and instincts.

A fresh breeze filled our sails and wafted us along. It was exquisite enjoyment. E. and F. entered into it heart and soul, and, of course, contributed greatly to our happiness. J. R. paid marked attention to E., and I believed then, and have believed ever since, that she basely deserted my colours and went over to the enemy.

Before long we passed out of Breydon into the narrower waters of the Yare, which flow right up to Norwich, though by no means in a perfectly straight line.

One's sailing experiences are always the same on the Broads. You are not one moment towering amidst mountains, the next gliding through laughing valleys. It is ever the same flat country, diversified by farms and villages, churches and windmills. Cattle, peacefully grazing, everywhere abound; windmills are conspicuous. You are ever amongst the reeds and rushes, listening to their murmur, enjoying the delightful swish and swirl of the water. The sights and sounds are full of repose. They are the best physician on earth; more healing and restoring than all the tonics the wide world contains.

To us that morning it was all a delight. The hours passed like moments. The girls were full of wit and fun, virtues which are theirs by inheritance. When the hour struck for luncheon, and the champagne, in honour of the "company," was taken out of its refrigerator, we could scarcely believe the evidence of our watches. We looked back, expecting to see Great Yarmouth still not far off. But it had long and long gone out of sight. The sun was high in the heavens; we were a good deal more than half way on our journey. Reedham had passed away. The swing bridge had long since opened and closed for us; we were abreast of Rockland Broad.

It was wild and dark-looking, overgrown with reeds and rushes, mingled with water-plants and flowers. The men told us the waters swarmed with eels, and if we had had time and appliances and cared to wait, we might have caught any number. But we had neither net nor anything else with us. As I have already said, we had not come to the Broads to fish, but to take life lazily. Those,

however, who spend weeks upon the Broads, must go in for all the sport it will afford them. One cannot be idle for ever.

To-day we found more life upon the water; more craft passed us; wherries and yachts and small boats. The Yare, leading up to Norwich, is at all times more frequented than the other rivers of Norfolk and Suffolk.

Presently we found ourselves passing Surlingham Broad, near which were many rowing-boats for hire. Various detachments had come down from Norwich, and were getting into them for an afternoon's enjoyment upon the river. They were noisy and merry, after their kind, and their loud laughter echoed long after we had passed out of sight.

Approaching Norwich, the scenery grew softer and more sylvan; the landscape more undulating; the grass even in the meadows, greener and more velvety. We passed well-kept country seats, and finely-timbered grounds; the cattle grazed in shady pastures, and here and there far-off groups might be seen playing the inevitable lawn-tennis.

Then came Thorpe, one of the prettiest villages in England, as seen from the river. Charming houses, bordering the water-side and luxuriating in great richness of vegetation, were covered with climbing creepers, surrounded by gardens and flowers, overshadowed by spreading oaks and elms.

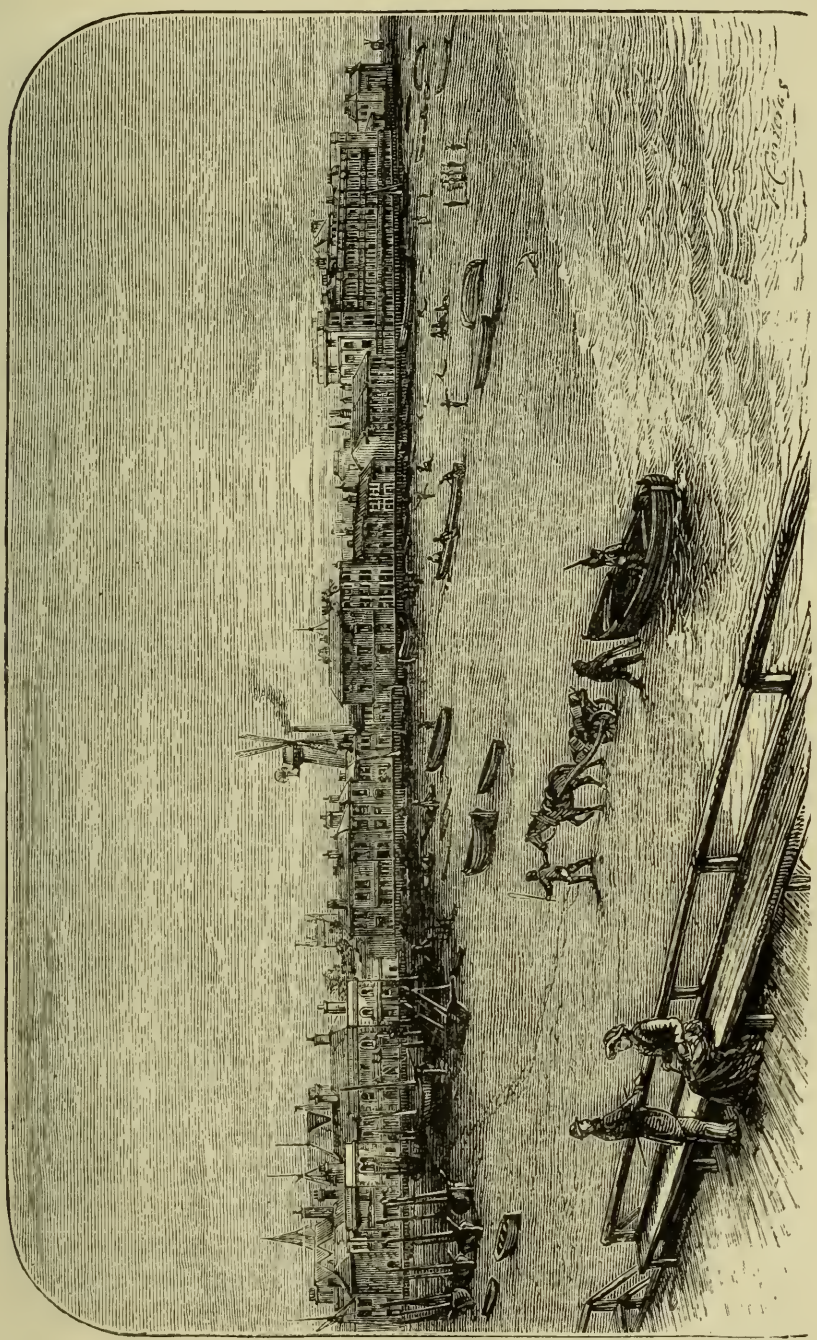
Then Norwich opened up, and the tall steeple of its cathedral. Our day's journey, as far as the water was concerned, was over. We moored just outside the town, in the neighbourhood of barges given up to work rather than pleasure, whose owners were of the rough-and-ready kind. But they in no way interfered with us, whilst we rather enjoyed the homeliness of the scene.

It was afternoon. The sun had passed its meridian: and our first duty was to pay a visit to the cathedral, which J. R. had never seen. We had a somewhat long walk before us; and J. R. and E., of deliberate intent and malice aforethought, appropriated each other and walked off arm-in-arm, condescending to intimate that they would lead the way, and we might follow—not too closely. They put up an umbrella, pretending it was to screen them from the sun. We knew quite well it was to hide their blushes. But I am glad to say that the odour of sanctity and the ecclesiastical atmosphere surrounding the precincts of the cathedral, as well as the imposing solemnity of the building itself, had a salutary effect upon this mutually enthusiastic pair: and the elopement to Gretna Green, which we felt sure they had at one moment contemplated, was indefinitely postponed.

Later in the evening we placed them safely in the train which would take them homewards; E. having first extracted a promise from J. R. that we would return to Great Yarmouth the next day, and spend Sunday with them. It was the very arrangement we had

proposed to each other when we had left them the previous night, during our long walk under the night stars.

We had another long, and rather less quiet walk to-night, to regain our quarters on board the *Mockingbird*.



GREAT YARMOUTH.

This time we found it deserted. The attractions of the town were no doubt too powerful for the men. But they had done their work well, and it was right they should have their recreation. There was no watch to keep on deck; no rocks ahead; no danger of collision.

It was a balmy night, and we sat talking under the stars, until the small hours again chimed from the church clocks with which Norwich abounds. The water lapped the sides of the little vessel. There were no reeds to murmur and whisper; no Pan to play his pipe, either in the major or the minor key. The banks, on the contrary, were commonplace and unromantic. Nevertheless, J. R. presently fell into a dreamy mood; and finished up by knocking the ashes out of his meerschaum, and asking me in a sentimental tone my favourite feminine Christian name. I felt that I had not the slightest necessity to ask him his.

We were, indeed, favoured by the weather. The next morning again rose bright and glorious. We had decided not to leave too soon. We both wanted to pay another visit to the cathedral: if possible, attend morning service, and listen to the rise and fall of the music as it echoed through the beautiful aisles and arches. The men told us that if we left at mid-day we should have plenty of time to get back to Great Yarmouth by night. What little wind there was, favoured us, and the tide would serve up to ten o'clock.

We were fortunate in hearing an excellent service. The cathedral is not large, but it is beautiful, and, from the ancient and imposing stalls, with their quaint fifteenth century carving, we listened to the grave chanting of the prayers, the harmony of voices that went vibrating through nave and arch. Then the organ pealed forth its last voluntary, and clergy and choristers filed out, and the small congregation took its departure.

We had only exchanged the reeds of the river for the reeds of the organ. It was very much the same influence, differently brought about: a slight but welcome interlude in our week on the Broads. These variations give tone and colouring to one's recollections and impressions. They fasten themselves on the memory. The slow sailing over the waters day after day; the calm, sylvan scenes; the whispering breeze and the murmuring reeds and rushes; the sunny skies by day, the flashing stars by night; through all, like an undertone, runs the unconscious influence of an hour spent in the repose of a cathedral service, with all its soothing influence.

We made our way back to the *Mockingbird*. The day was still perfect, the sky without a cloud. The men were ready to start, and, before long, we found ourselves retracing our steps of yesterday. It was Saturday, and, I suppose, a half-holiday here, as in many other parts of the world. The river was in consequence tolerably crowded with rowing-boats, which often had to get out of our way as best they could. Many of their occupants were evidently not very much at home in handling the oars, and many a collision we just escaped by the dexterity of our skipper and chief mate. At Surlingham, in trying to avoid a particularly careless crew, we almost went aground, in which case we should scarcely have made Yarmouth that night.

The return journey could hardly equal that of the previous day.

In the first place, second impressions can never quite come up to first, for the first press of the grape must ever be sweetest. And, secondly, we had not THOSE DREADFUL GIRLS on board to enliven us with their wit and sallies; point and counterpoint of repartee. They were, no doubt, in the safe shelter of their delightful home, though heartily wishing themselves on board the *Mockingbird*. J. R. was a little less full of life than usual, but every mile of our journey added to his exhilaration.

As far as the actual sailing was concerned, the charm was quite equal to that of yesterday. Nay, almost more delightful. The afternoon was intensely hot, and, in a fit of super-indolence, I left the yacht, and, with a book, threw myself full length in our dingey. There, for a couple of hours, I was towed along, with an exquisite sensation, through the swirling water; the reeds and rushes all about me; white and yellow water-lilies holding up their delicate cups, and positively asking to be plucked; the land, above me, appearing like scenes in a panorama rather than reality; the skies blue and laughing. It is worth while living and suffering for such hours as these: perfect in their charm, their mental and moral elevation. Coming to us only now and then, we prize them the more for their rarity. They are an earnest of what shall be; for at such moments one's earthly chains seem to fall away, and for a brief space we live the life of the spirit.

Presently eight bells struck, and the captain intimated that his cabin boy had luxuriated in idleness quite long enough; so the dingey was hauled up alongside and the exchange was made. There was an excellent brew in the cabin of the cup that cheers but not inebriates, and J. R., as we approached nearer to Great Yarmouth, found his spirits rising to fever heat.

But we took it leisurely, and the sun had gone down when we once more launched into Breydon waters, more wild and weird-looking than ever in the twilight of that summer evening. We could only find moorings outside another yacht with a very loud party on board; who gave us neither peace nor repose, until they set sail the next morning at four o'clock, and left us masters of the situation.

Sunday we made a day of rest, as far as sailing was concerned. True to our promise, the Rector's household had scarcely risen from breakfast when we put in an appearance and earned for ourselves the title of the Indefatigables.

Later, we returned with E. and F. to Great Yarmouth and attended service at the Parish Church. It is of course a beautiful and interesting building, but somehow seems open to all the winds of heaven. One feels lost in it; the interior wants concentration; the congregation look straggling; it is difficult to hear the service. The organ is a magnificent instrument in two parts; one part on either side the choir, in the outer aisles. These parts are connected by electricity; but the echo is so great that all beauty of performance and

expression is lost, and it is often difficult to make out even the melody that is being played.

We saw how quaint and interesting was Great Yarmouth itself; how unlike any other English town. E. and F. piloted us up and down some of the curious and innumerable "Rows:" long streets or passages, so narrow that you can touch the walls on either side as you walk through them. They afford endless bits of effect: nooks and corners, and old houses, and quaint old people, sufficient to occupy an artist all the days of his life. No other town in England possesses these singular rows, and it is only after some acquaintance with them, and considerable searching, that you discover their artistic merits.

Many nooks and corners are hidden in passages and courtyards, opening right and left; and it requires some boldness, and occasionally an apology for intrusion, to find them out. But the people are very friendly and amiable, and are quite willing that you should come in and pay them a visit, and admire their ancient abodes. They wonder what you can see in them. For their own part they could imagine life under happier auspices: and a staring model-lodging-house would possess charms for them far beyond these crazy, tumble-down old relics of the past. Still, tastes differ, they will tell you; "and gentlefolk has time for crazes, whilst poor folk has only time for work."

The quay of Great Yarmouth is not its least charm. It is very Dutch-like in character, quite relieved from the common-place. On one side you have pointed, gabled houses; on the other the long harbour formed by the Yare, crowded with shipping from many lands. The flags of Norway and Sweden are conspicuous on this Sunday morning, and the piles of white, scented timber on the opposite side of the quay remind you of the endless forests of Scandinavia, with all their undying charm.

At the end of all this come the denes, with that hideous Nelson column for ever staring you in the face: the figure of Britannia ungratefully turning her back upon the waves she has ruled so long. Then, beyond, come the piers of Gorleston, which seem to be the pride and delight of all artists; for no exhibition seems complete unless its catalogue records at least one reproduction of "Gorleston Harbour." The bracing air of Great Yarmouth of course makes it one of the very healthiest places in England.

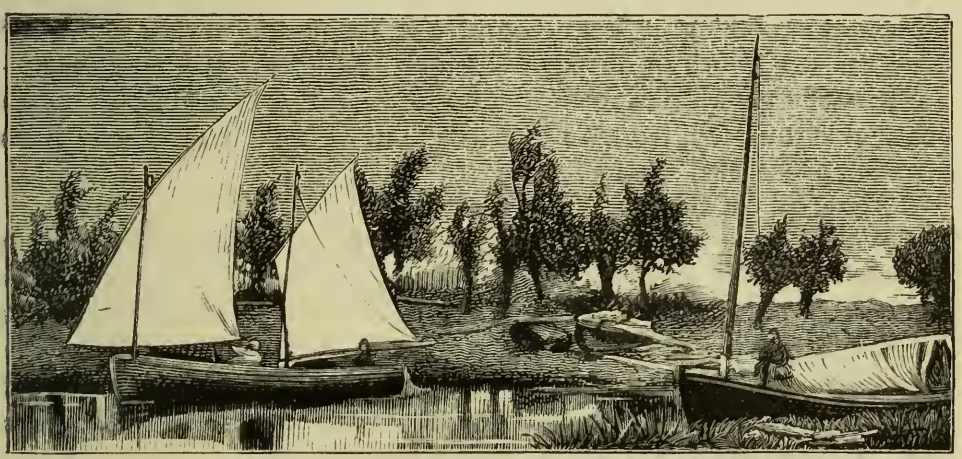
That Sunday, which had been a red-letter day to us, came to an end. Not before night had fallen and the stars had come out, did we say farewell; and made our way back to our head-quarters on board the *Mockingbird*.

The next two days would be a sort of dallying with the Broads. Our week was up on Wednesday, and J. R. was also obliged to be in town on Wednesday night. We had no time to go very much farther afield. We had not done the Broads to anything like half their

extent; but it must be understood that we had not come to "do" them; merely to spend a week upon them. To become thoroughly acquainted with the Broads, would take not one week but several.

Then again there was the possibility of being becalmed, when one's progress may be sure but is very slow. The men, with the best will in the world, can only send the craft along with their poles at the rate of a tortoise gallop: and this with hard work; earning food and wage literally by the sweat of their brow. True the tortoise won the race in the end, but that was through being wise. If we were not wise now, we might easily, on Wednesday morning, find ourselves on the very wrong, very far side of Oulton Broad.

Therefore we decided to make two days of the run from Yarmouth to Oulton: bringing up the first night once more at the quaint old



ON THE BROADS.

village, where perhaps the Postmaster by this time had managed to solve J. R.'s profound problem. The second night we should bring up at Somerlayton; and the following morning would, under the most adverse circumstances, quickly land us at Oulton Broad.

We had said good-bye on the Sunday night to Mr. and Mrs. Rector and THOSE DREADFUL GIRLS. J. R. was very depressed, for we were to see them no more. We went back to the yacht. To J. R. it seemed cold and deserted. He confided to me that he felt like Marianna in a moated Mockingbird. We were to start the next morning at nine.

At eight o'clock I was on deck putting the finishing touch to my toilette. No doubt it was an airy dressing-room, but at that hour we had the world to ourselves. J. R., after a sleepless night of anguish, had fallen into a feverish doze with daylight, and had only just turned out—pale, haggard, unrefreshed; quite woe-begone. There was a turning just opposite to us: the end of the Mazes. Suddenly two figures appeared upon the scene. Fortunately I was presentable. I

am one of those happy and consistent creatures who are never taken unawares. I do not believe in that sort of thing.

Not so J. R. "Look! look!" I cried. "THOSE DREADFUL GIRLS!" It was then that they received their name. In reality, it was, of course, a term of endearment. You should have seen J. R. He turned first as pale as death, then as red as a lobster, and literally dived into the cabin as one takes a header into the sea. There, he sank back upon a seat, very much overcome. Yet I thought he looked rather radiant with it all.

"By the beard of 'Ali Crokah!'" (an Eastern gentleman) "I am undone!" he cried. "Do you think they saw me? But how devoted of them to come down! They must have started overnight. This will have to end in a double wedding at that draughty old parish church. Both organs and full choral service."

As for the girls themselves, the moment they heard my terrible exclamation, taking it literally, and not for rapture, they collapsed upon the stonework in dismay. The rats had been playing hide-and-seek, having grown daring and independent with us (familiarity breeds contempt), but they now rushed away out of sight and we saw them no more.

I hastened on shore to the rescue.

"We thought we would take you by surprise," said E., with a most reproachful gaze. "We meant to come and breakfast with you, as a sort of morning stirrup-cup: an *abschied.* We rose at cockcrow, and mamma dismissed us with a Blessing, and papa sent you his Benediction. And this is our reward. Did you hear, Flo? He called us THOSE DREADFUL GIRLS! Let us return at once. You never thought we should hear it, but we *did* hear it."

I had the greatest difficulty in persuading them that I had intended them to hear it, and had meant it as a term of affection. They came round at last and accorded me absolution. By this time J. R. had become a civilised being; and with all the strength and reserve of our locker, and with our best porcelain breakfast service, we sat down to quite a sumptuous repast. E. began fumbling in her pocket: and I thought that perhaps, like the renowned Mrs. Prig, on another, and, let us hope, by no means similar occasion, she was about to present us with a lettuce and a cucumber: but when the refractory object was at last brought to light, it proved to be a charming family group. This, of course, was for J. R. I was left completely out in the cold. "Serves you right," said E., who still had tears in her voice, "for calling us names." At that moment, if we had had any dynamite on board, I believe that we should all have gone to crumbling and chaos.

Of course sailing was delayed. We made the most of our guests, and felt quite as happy here as if we had been wafting up the Broads with a gale of wind behind us. We landed and visited the market-place, and bought flowers, and did homage, and made our peace.

At twelve o'clock we could delay no longer. The tide would not serve us, and the wind had dropped almost to a calm. There was a last good-bye. One last long lingering look they gave (E. and J. R.) and parted in silence and tears. The gangway was withdrawn, the ropes slacked; we were off. For a long time we watched them gazing at the *Mockingbird* like petrified statues: whilst J. R., in a state bordering on melancholia, gave such wild orders to the men that, if they had followed them out, we should now be at the bottom of Breydon water.

It was slow progress that day, but none the less pleasant. J. R. revived, and we were happier than kings. The swirl of the water for ever lapped about us; the reeds and the rushes whispered and murmured; Pan played to us. It was the most delicious, restful idleness in the world. We had left London with faces more or less what London faces usually are; we were now—to make use of the comparison a second time—as red as lobsters. J. R. compared our complexions to pickled cabbage, but I didn't quite like the idea. Naval officers, however, are not like other men; and their similes, like their anecdotes, are often peculiar.

Six o'clock had long struck when we found ourselves opposite our old village, where we intended to bring up for the night. History repeats itself, and the village was exactly as we had left it; the very same boys were at play; and we went over our old ground. We called at the Post-Office, and the postmaster recognised us again, and even accorded us a welcome. "Eh! but you've been in the sun," said he; "and you're as brown as hawthorn berries. And I've been thinking over that question o' yourn," turning to J. R., "but I can't make nothing of it. I never was good at 'rithmetic: never."

When we returned to the yacht, the very same skylark was giving his final evening song. Twilight was growing apace: the reeds and the rushes, and the landscape generally, were putting on their sad and solemn aspect. The trees whispered of the death of day. Darkness fell and closed the scene.

The next morning we quietly made our way to Somerlayton, and brought up beyond the swing bridge, so that nothing should delay us on Wednesday morning. We spent the afternoon in a long walk, admired the rustic village, the model cottages, which looked like little paradises for the poor; roamed through the park, revelled in the great lime avenue, and made friends with the deer. The walks and the lanes are charming, and it was a charming time of the year. June roses abounded, and the hedges were full of wild flowers. We despatched a telegram to E. and F., informing them of our progress, and our intention of making Oulton Broad by nine o'clock on Wednesday morning, and Lowestoft by ten. At seven o'clock we were on board again, where the men had prepared us a grand repast for the last time. We had moored close to a wasps' nest, and found ourselves

in danger of torment. But J. R. set a cunning trap for them, to which they rapidly fell victims.

So passed our last night on the Broads, and we rose next morning with profound sighs. Our happy moments pass so quickly; our very lives as a tale that is told. We had been a week on the Broads: it really seemed only a few hours. The week, too, had been perfect: in experience, in weather, in enjoyment. Our interlude at Norwich, and our intervals in the neighbourhood of Great Yarmouth, had been the plums in a cake already overflowing with richness. We longed to repeat the experiment. But that could not be. Our cake was eaten,

NEAR SOMERLAYTON.

our roses were gathered. And those who go and do likewise, if equally favoured with ourselves, will never repent it.

We launched into Oulton Broad on the Wednesday morning, with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain: those twin genii that go hand in hand through life: and we made fast to our moorings with a strange reluctance. It was all over, and I think the men were almost as sorry as ourselves that it was the end and not the beginning of the cruise. This argued well for all concerned. It is good to be able to wind up and depart, leaving happy thoughts and pleasant impressions and light hearts behind you.

About ten o'clock we steamed into Lowestoft station. There on the platform stood E. and F.

"THOSE DREADFUL GIRLS!" they cried, laughing. "If we call

you the Indefatigables, you will call us the Inevitables. We thought we would come over and bring you these letters," said E., handing me a small packet of them. It really was good of her. "They arrived this morning. We have orders, too, to take you back with us. If you don't come, papa withdraws his Benediction."

We needed no threats, and very little pressing. After a second breakfast at the Royal Hotel, so charmingly situated near the pier and the sea: a sort of déjeuner à la fourchette, in commemoration of last Monday's breakfast on board the yacht: and after strolling about the pier and enjoying the waves and the breeze and all the life and animation upon the water, we departed. Lowestoft saw us no more.

Some hours later we were steaming towards London: our time on the Broads a thing of the past: nothing but a recollection. But a recollection full of healthful pleasure and delight. Of delicious sailings and glidings amidst calm waters; of peaceful, if somewhat monotonous, landscapes; of murmuring reeds and rushes; of Pan playing to us; of water-lilies crying out to be gathered; of larks rising towards heaven's gate, ever singing as they soared; of rural walks, and rustic villagers who helped one to trifling but laughing incidents; of balmy breezes, and exhilarating, uninterrupted sunshine, that had gilded our days.

"It has been a perfect week," said J. R., as we steamed into Liverpool Street. "But, mind you, we should not have thought it half so charming, if it hadn't been for THOSE DREADFUL GIRLS!"

GRAZIELLA.

THE Circus Koberstein boasted the finest horses, wittiest clowns and most daring athletes of any troupe that had ever come to Nuremberg; but the attraction that filled the building to overflowing, was the lovely little Signorina Graziella and her graceful antics on three black Arabian horses.

Surmises as to who the charming young *équestrienne* might be were rife among the *habitués* of the circus. Some declared her the daughter of a noble house on whom disgrace had fallen. Others recognised her as the child of a certain state prisoner, who, because of her father's misfortunes, was obliged to seek her own livelihood. All were unanimous in believing that she was no light-headed lassie gathered from a city's poverty and vice; for she politely but firmly held all admirers at a distance, refused their love-tokens, one and all, and abashed the most assured by her simple, child-like purity.

She was in reality neither a Signorina nor a great lady in disguise. She was only pretty little Mary Banks, a Berkshire farmer's daughter, who had spent her childhood days in the fresh country air, galloping over the moors and hillsides on a rough pony, acquiring a grace and fearlessness that any city-bred equestrian might sigh for in vain.

She had, a year before, spent some months in Germany, and had made the acquaintance of the brothers Koberstein, through mutual friends. They were worthy and respectable men, the fathers of large families, irreproachable in their domestic lives, well considered by their fellow townsmen. They had fallen in love with Mary Banks's pure and lovely face, had discovered her extraordinary skill, grace, and daring on horseback, and half-laughingly had asked her if she would not become a member of their troupe. The offer was to bear fruit in the future. When reverses came and her father died, Mary remembered the offer, and the brothers were only too glad to receive her. So it came to pass that in less than a year's time, she had become the queen of the arena. At seventeen Mary Banks, alias Signorina Graziella, began to win for herself golden laurels, which, in prosaic coin of the country, found their way to the needy friends in Berkshire; none the less acceptable for having been gathered under the tinsel canopy of a German circus.

As Graziella would enter the arena, no eyes among the enthusiastic spectators rested on her so admiringly and lovingly as those of Paul Hillern; and no one else endured such torturing anxiety lest, in her daring leaps on the backs of her horses, she might lose her footing and fall. But she never fell, and after each performance she gathered up her bouquets and boxes of bonbons with the same happy smile, to appear on the following evening as fresh as ever.

"The girl has not a bit of the hunted, weary look that one so often sees among these fairies of the arena," people said of her, giving in words Graziella's greatest fascination.

Paul Hillern was also a member of the troupe, but a very humble one compared with Graziella. His duty was to collect and count the tickets at each representation, see that the cushions and carpets were properly dusted and shaken, and to make himself useful in whatever way occasion offered. The Circus Koberstein had established itself at Nuremberg for the winter season, built and furnished its own great barn of a building, and within its walls, the servants found little time for idleness.

Hillern's duties kept him many a weary night out of his bed, but in addition to a very meagre pay, he was allowed the priceless boon of watching night after night the performance of his idol, Graziella, from an undesirable seat behind the musicians.

The young man had known far better days and had associations of a far more elevating type than the gaudy glitter of the circus. But he had been unfortunate and had grown very shy and reserved, and the only being to whom he had even spoken of his troubles was Graziella herself, who, with her gentle, sympathetic ways, had charmed away his reticence.

They had gone out to walk together sometimes on Sunday afternoons: he in the seventh heaven of delight at what he considered her sweet condescension, and she trusting to his guidance as confidingly as if he had been her elder brother. That she could care for him in any other than a friendly way, Hillern never dreamed possible; he could as easily imagine a princess falling in love with a chimney-sweep; but in Paul Hillern the little prima-donna of the circus had a staunch friend and protector, who would willingly have given his life to save her an hour of suffering. There seemed to be a tacit understanding between these two waifs; and sometimes in the midst of her daring leaps Graziella would nod and smile at the shabby young fellow sitting forlornly behind the big drums, sending a thrill through his heart which changed the thumping and squeaking of the worn-out instruments into the music of heaven.

The representation was over, the clowns had washed away the paint and powder from their faces, and in loose, rusty clothes had repaired to the nearest inn for a pipe and glass of beer before going to bed. The ladies and gentlemen of the ring had departed to their respective quarters in the town; and the horses, seventy in number, had been safely blanketed for the night in their stables directly adjoining the circus building.

Hillern was left in sole charge; the regular watchman being allowed leave to attend a wedding at a neighbouring village.

While busy over his accounts, he was interrupted by a tramp of the raggedest type, who, attracted by the light, stumbled up the steps of

the entrance, and begged to be allowed to sleep on one of the cushioned benches inside.

Such requests had frequently been made before, and Hillern had strict orders to refuse them all. And so reluctantly enough—for the fellow looked very weary and had a kindly, honest face—Hillern, in the words so detested by little Jo, bade him "move on." Then in the puzzling rows of figures before him, he forgot the vagrant's existence as soon as the sentence was uttered.

His office work finished, Hillern pulled a volume of Schiller from his pocket and began to read to keep himself awake.

It was cold in the little *bureau*, and he began to think longingly of the warmth and comfort within his reach if he chose to take it. The boxes frequented by the richer class of circus-goers were carpeted, cushioned unsparingly, and warmed with hot water pipes. Here he might stretch himself at his ease, oblivious to the frosty air outside, and save himself many hours of discomfort. The only obstacle was the light. A rule rigorously enforced was that no uncovered light should be taken within the circus building; and Hillern had no portable light possible to read by; nothing but a thick candle which he had bought to illumine the little room in a side street where he slept.

He secured this candle in an empty ink bottle: a cautious fellow like himself could surely break the rule once with impunity, and the night was bitterly cold: double locked the doors and ensconced himself in box number five, with his open book on his knees.

The big ring and tiers of empty seats looked very ghostly in the light of his one candle, and the silence in that place, usually so teeming with sound, was very oppressive. He could almost imagine he saw the heavy oriental curtains, screening the entrance to the stables, roll aside, and Graziella gliding from beneath their folds.

Graziella! There was a magic in the name that made the young man forget the pages before him, his surroundings, everything save that he loved her, and longed with an unspeakable longing to take her away from scenes that must in time mar the priceless purity of her heart and mind. What a fool he was to have such aspirations! He was scarcely able to earn his own bread! And even if he had it in his own power to help Graziella to a better existence, she would probably scorn him as a stepping-stone.

The unaccustomed warmth told upon Hillern's senses until his waking dream gradually resolved itself into the grotesque fancies accompanying sleep.

Poverty and all its attendant horrors were forgotten, and with Graziella he revelled in all the delights of paradise. It was summer again, and the sun shone brilliantly, intensely, with a heat that slowly opened the dreamer's eyes. Where was he, and what had happened? Were those phantom horses prancing and tossing their heads in a mad gallop about the ring? And what meant the great

glare of light and the overpowering heat? Heavens! The whole place was on fire! The cushion beside him was smouldering sullenly, and the flames had licked their way along the row of seats, and were rushing madly up the painted wooden pillars to the roof. The angry red tongues met no resistance in their way, for the whole building was of light pine and burnt like tinder.

Those were not ghostly steeds in the arena, but real horses of flesh and blood, Graziella's darlings among them; deluded, poor brutes, into the ring by the glare of light which to them was the well-known signal for their performance. Though quivering and snorting with fright at the great blaze around them, the perfectly-trained creatures went through their exercises, balancing themselves on their hind legs, vaulting and prancing to and fro to the time of imaginary music, as carefully as if their master stood in the midst of them directing every movement.

Hillern saw his overturned candle lying at his feet, the unmistakable source of that stream of fire, and his heart stood still with horror. "Fire! Fire!" he shouted, with all the energy of despair; and "Fire! Fire! Fire!" was echoed by a host of brazen throats in the streets; and soon the whole town knew that the Circus Koberstein was a mass of flames.

Outside the burning building, a unit in the great crowd, Hillern could not bear to stand and see the work of destruction go on. The shrieks of the dying horses which no one could rescue, the doleful predictions of ruin to the brothers Koberstein and the troupe dependent on them, went through him like a knife; for he, and he alone, was to blame for this tragic result of his wicked carelessness. How could he face his employers on the morrow and confess his guilt?

The thought was madness; and, covering his face with his hands, he stole out of the crowd, and, like a hunted deer, sped through byways and alleys far, far away into the open country.

He had no other pursuer than a guilty conscience; but that seemed goading him to desperation. Far better for him would it have been had he perished in the flames he had kindled. Still he flew on, until, utterly exhausted, he sank down at the outskirts of a village, and crawled into a barn, where, on a pile of hay, he fell into a deep sleep.

Again Hillern awoke, but on a scene delightfully calm and peaceful compared with the wild tumult of the previous night. Men were chopping wood under an adjoining shed; and one of them was singing over his work. A girl was carrying on her head a pail of foaming milk towards a rambling farm-house. At Hillern's request for a drink of the refreshing liquid, she cheerfully set the bucket down, and after he had satisfied his thirst, made him follow her to the house, where more substantial refreshment was urged upon him. The kindness of these rustic people seemed to Hillern a good omen for his future—a hope that was verified afterwards.

In a far distant town, the wanderer gained the post of amanuensis to an eccentric old gentleman, for whom the labour was very light; and Hillern's fortunes prospered better than ever in his life before. His employer was an Englishman residing abroad; a Mr. Codrington. He seemed to like the young man from the first, and gave him many a proof of his favour. One day, it happened that, at great risk to his own life, Hillern was able to rescue the old gentleman from certain death, in the form of an advancing locomotive at the Dresden railway station; and, out of gratitude, Mr. Codrington advanced his young protégé to the position of private secretary, with a promise of a gradually increasing salary.

A year passed, and during a few weeks' holiday, an irresistible desire to revisit Nuremberg, the scene hallowed to him by memories of Graziella, took possession of Hillern. He had never heard any particulars of the great fire, the extent of the loss, or the fortunes of the troupe since his desertion. He only knew that the circus Koberstein was not yet disbanded. He longed to hear of the welfare of his darling, and to know in which of the many towns on their track his friends of the ring had established themselves. Did Graziella ever think of him, or wonder what had become of him? He feared these questions would remain unanswered for many a long day.

He left the railway train at one of the suburbs of Nuremberg, and, walking towards the town, his path led through the cemetery. It was early spring, and the countless wooden crosses were hung with fresh wreaths, and fragrant violets peeped forth from many of the better tended resting-places of the dead. One grave especially was remarkable for the wealth of primroses upon it, and Hillern, curious to know more of one so evidently regretted, stopped to read the inscription on a fresh marble cross raised over the grave.

To his amazement he read as follows:

Erected to the Memory of

Paul Hillern,

Who perished by fire on the night of

January 8th, 18—.

R. I. P.

So this was his supposed fate; and he was a dead man to his friends, if he had any place at all in their memories. He could not be quite forgotten, because of the primrose garlands on his grave. And yet what friend had he left in the town who would care to offer him this graceful tribute? It was very flattering and very mysterious too. It was a natural supposition that he had met his death in the fire, but still it was not pleasant to think the world had laid him so comfortably to rest. What a fright any of his old acquaintances would have, if they saw him walking in the graveyard like an uneasy ghost. But all who knew him had dispersed long ago, and he need not fear discovery.

Another surprise awaited Hillern as he neared the town. Posters were stuck on every available wall, on which the words Signorina Graziella, in letters a foot long, dazzled his eyes, as if written in fire. By a strange fatality the re-organised Circus Koberstein had returned to Nuremberg, and had given its first representation on the eve of Hillern's arrival. It had new appointments throughout. Its valuable horses had been worthily replaced; it had been able to retain most of its former artistes, the renowned Signorina Graziella among them; and it hoped for a renewal of the kind patronage of the public.

So Graziella and he again breathed the same air. Hillern's heart beat warmly at the thought. But he had no right to show his face again in the familiar haunts, or to re-establish the old friendliness with the girl whom he adored. He was an outlaw—a dead man—whose appearance would only terrify her and all else who saw him. Disconsolately enough he turned away from the direction of the new circus, whither his steps were leading him instinctively.

Once in a semi-disguise he took a seat in a dark corner of the building, where he could watch Graziella in her graceful movements as of old. She was, if possible, lovelier than ever, but a shade more serious-looking, he fancied.

An elegantly-dressed young gentleman in one of the private boxes awakened a jealous uneasiness in Hillern by his undisguised admiration of Graziella, which she seemed faintly to reciprocate. The handsome stranger devoured her with his eyes all through her performance, and at its conclusion a most superb bouquet of rare flowers was presented to her by a servant in livery. Reasoning with himself, Hillern remembered that such adulation had been heaped upon the little fairy ever since her first appearance in public without any further result, and he decided that he was a fool for his anxiety.

For a few days Hillern haunted the town like a culprit, and then resolved to quit the place for ever, until a conversation he overheard in a café decided him to prolong his stay.

"The frosty Graziella seems melting at last under the rays of Count Greffken's smile," said a gentleman, sipping his glass of Benedictiner.

"They say she thinks he has serious intentions; wants to marry her. Imagine the feelings of the lady mother if her son brought home a circus girl to his ancestral roof, even though she were lovely as Venus herself."

"That Greffken could be in earnest is perfectly absurd, and the girl is a fool to trust him. I know for a certainty that before many weeks have passed, his engagement with a distant cousin of his from North Germany will be formally announced."

"Poor little Graziella will be heart-broken. Hush, here he comes."

The man whom Hillern had noticed in the box at the circus

joined his friends with a polite greeting, and took out his cigar case.

Hillern listened no more; he had heard and seen enough to assure him that Graziella was in great danger, and needed his protection.

How to arrange an interview with her was the next perplexing question, and forming different plans to this end, his steps led him again towards the cemetery. Someone was bending over his grave —a woman. Strange that the resting-place of such a waif could awaken interest! Perhaps now he would discover the ministering angel who adorned his ashes with flowers. A dozen paces nearer and he recognised Graziella, fastening a fresh primrose wreath to the marble cross. She wore the same simple dress of a year ago when they had gone together on those delicious rambles in search of the same flowers of which her graceful offering was made.

Though wild with eagerness to throw himself at her feet and thank her for her angelic goodness, Hillern dared not shock her by presenting himself before her as one risen from the dead, but slipped quietly out of sight behind a tall monument to await her departure. She carefully removed all the faded flowers from the turf, disposed tastefully the new ones, and then with tears raining down her face, bent down and kissed the grave passionately. Then, with bowed head and drawn veil, she left the peaceful city of the dead.

What more touching proof of her attachment, and perhaps love, could he have than this scene in which she believed herself entirely alone? The triumphant thought that she mourned him in her heart awakened a wild hope in Hillern's bosom, and all his fears of the past week melted away like snow. He would now come forward and brave the wrath of his former employers, if only to save Graziella from her false lover.

He wrote her a letter asking for a meeting in an adjacent park, and speaking of a serious mistake which he would explain, signed his own name and awaited the result.

With eyes big and bright with astonishment, Graziella, accompanied by her maid, came to the appointed trysting-place of the friend whom she had mourned as dead for more than a year.

Amazed at his own temerity, Hillern came forward, took the frightened girl in his arms, and actually kissed her white forehead.

"Is it really you, Paul, and no ghost or cruel deception?" she said, showing no eagerness to free herself from the contact of his arm.

She had never called him Paul before, and for the moment it seemed to the young man the most musical name in all the calendar.

"But explain, Paul. My head aches with trying to guess the truth."

Paul then related every particular of the story which had weighed upon him for so many months, confessing his guilt, and feeling more light-hearted that his secret was no longer his alone.

"But who was the poor charred creature they found in the ruins? You watched alone that night."

"Did anyone perish in the flames?"

"Yes; the remains of a man were found, and of course we all thought it must be you. Oh, it was dreadful!"

The figure of the weary tramp who had begged a shelter on that memorable night—forgotten until that moment—rose up before Hillern's mental vision. The poor fellow must have slyly stolen in regardless of his command, and so met his death.

"My carelessness cost a human life, as well as more valuable property than I can ever hope to restore," he said disconsolately. "Do you not despise such a scoundrel, Graziella?"

"It was only an accident after all; you blame yourself too much," said the girl gently. "And I am so thankful to have you back again," taking one of his hands in both her tiny palms. "Do you know, Paul, I have mourned you very bitterly. You were such a good, true friend, and I needed you so much. Someone, the son of a very grand family, told me he loved me, and that every luxury should be mine if I would love him in return."

"The villain!"

"Oh, no, he was not a villain. I did not care for him much, but I had no one else. You were gone, and the circus was growing very hateful to me. I sometimes felt that this man must be deceiving me, for why should so fine a gentleman want to marry a poor circus girl? No one seemed to care enough for me to find out the truth; they only said I was in great luck, and ought not to criticise my good fortune too closely. I was greatly perplexed and troubled, and my only consolation was to go and sob my grief out on your grave, thinking, perhaps, you would hear and pity me."

"Poor Graziella!"

"Now I have you back again, and my grand lover may bestow his bouquets and tender glances on someone more worthy of them. I am in doubt no longer."

"My darling! Are you telling the truth? Do you really care for me a little?"

"You foolish boy! I have loved you ever since I lost you! And long before that—only you would not see it."

The brothers Koberstein had been largely reimbursed for their loss by fire through generous public subscription, and were therefore ready to judge Paul Hillern leniently, and declared themselves averse to his making any restitution whatever of their property. A kindness which he rewarded by taking from them the brightest star of their firmament—Graziella.

EXPIATION.

(*The Devil's Bridge, Aberystwith.*)

By C. J. Langston.

Where falls the streamlet in a narrow rift
Of hoary rock, and garrulous with age
For ever murmurs amid shale and drift
The weirdly legend of a convent's sage.

Two hundred feet it falls, with fleck and foam
And fourfold pause : uncertain where to glide ;
And here, half-wearied with the spacious home,
Came haughty Henrique and his listless bride.

Nature, with care of countless years had laid
A carpet of fine lichen at their feet ;
Above, the eglantine and jasmine strayed ;
For loving hearts a trysting-place how sweet !

He climbed with ardent haste the rugged height,
And plucked a fern of comely shape and rare ;
Then, with the kindling eye where love is light,
He placed it gently in her golden hair.

But she, Belgravia's belle, who thought the glare
Of midnight gas far brighter than the ray
Of sunshine, tossed the trifle in the air,
And, laughing, moved with careless mien away.

Another light now flashed in Henrique's eyes ;
A stronger passion made his pulses beat ;
" No heart," cried he, " within that bosom lies ;
Scorn—silent scorn ; and yet I must entreat.

" O wondrous spark from that fierce flame that drove
Our father Adam forth ; the only light
To lighten all his weary race who rove,
Storm-tossed and trembling, through the folds of night

" To love where love is lost ; and, loving still,
Find pleasure in a phantom ; yet to bear
The day's blank sorrow, and the cruel chill ;
My heart's core turned to ashes in despair."

* * * * * *

Full twenty years, and Henrique's only child,
Dark like her sire and to his sorrow heir,
Came as a bride to this enchanted wild :
The pale Irene and the proud St. Clair.

Meanwhile the tiny fern, so lightly flung,
Lodged in a crevice lined with earth, and spread
Its fairy fronds, until aloft it hung,
Waving a welcome to the newly wed.

Irene sighed—had she not all she sought?
A lord of peerless beauty; stainless birth;
Soft eastern eyes, and winning smiles that brought
A sunlight more than Eden to the earth.

Yes! birth and beauty: all but heart was there.
The lofty brow, arched lip and rosy cheek.
Can deepest love adjure a form so fair,
And still the smiling statue never speak?

Thus all Irene's love was backward thrown
To clog and canker at the withered heart;
For ever with him and for ever lone;
United, yet, in dearest life, apart.

And, resting on a shelving seat, she spied
The fragile fern thus waving overhead:
"Green image of my sunless life," she cried;
"Your hand, St. Clair, can reach its yielding bed.

"The trifling treasure may be valued most;
Pluck it entire; this little boon I crave;
For well my father loved this Cambrian coast;
I go to plant it on his Southern grave."

POPPY.

By G. B. Stuart.

IN mid-August in the West Country there are but two colours largely represented in nature: the yellow tints of wheat, oats and barley, and the blue of the sea which fills in all the rest of the picture. Overhead there is blue—pale turquoise—and green is nowhere.

It is not a land of trees, for Dartmoor is close behind, and such groups of pines as have been planted to shelter the farm-houses look almost black in the noontide sun. Miles on miles there are of these upland harvest fields, divided by narrow lanes and stone walls that seem held together only by the hundreds of tiny ferns and creeping things that grow, and seed, and wither, and spring up again a thousand-fold more lustily every year. It seems as if it were generally high noon on our sea-girt high lands, with the wheat-fields like burnished gold against the sky.

All last summer Poppy Williams used to flit about the narrow lanes between the corn-fields, carrying her red umbrella, which could be seen for miles like a gigantic flower, and blinking her short-sighted eyes at the blinding blues and yellows. It was long since they had seen anything more trying than the hum-drum greys, and browns, and drabs of the dingy London suburb where she was a Board-School teacher. When she wrote to engage Mr. Gridge's lodging she had signed her letter P. Williams (her Christian name was Patience, but the people of Stanacombe did not know that). Old Mr. Gridge, the sexton, had handed the letter round the village in his pride at expecting a "Lon'on lodger." He had looked for a young man, and lo, the coach dropped a young maid at his door, which filled him with apprehension. But she proved "mighty handy," and quite satisfied with the accommodation that old Gridge and his grand-daughter, Susan, had to offer.

And so arose some discussion as to how the sexton had fallen into this mistake. Whereupon Gridge justified himself by explaining that Peter and Paul and Percy, like the young Squire, and Pat, "if so be you were an Irishman, as there are a many tu Plymouth," were common enough lads' names; whereas he could not lay his tongue to a maid's name that began with P., saving Polly, that was "no christened name, and unlikely to obtain in Lon'on circles."

Some young farmer, with a touch of imagination (and sure, his name should have been recorded, for our Stanacombe men, though they have warm hearts, and shrewd heads, and strong hands, are not great at imagination), suggested Poppy for the newcomer's name.

The red umbrella was known by this time, for it had been up to the post once or twice, and had dawdled about the churchyard half the afternoon, and the idea was sufficiently obvious to take the fancy of the whole village. Miss Williams became "Poppy" on the spot.

When old Gridge told her the nickname, she laughed, and said: "It is a great deal prettier than my own; I will have it for my country name, and keep Patience for town use—it is sorely needed there." And as Poppy she was known through the length and breadth of Stanacombe parish.

There was one person in the place who never used the nickname, and yet he thought about it more than all the rest of them put together.

George Joslin was an odd young man, everyone allowed, and not only had ideas about farming which were entirely out of order according to Stanacombe precedent, but even went so far as to object to the gossip at the Dragon about the Lon'on lady and her doings. To do the Stanacombe men justice, there was nothing in their talk that Miss Williams herself might not have heard, had she been able to understand the jargon in which they commented on her "pa'ale fa'ace," her curly hair, her thinness, the mourning she wore, and the "educated" fashion of her speech. But something of all this incessant curiosity—for in a Devonshire village a nine days' wonder often exceeds its allotted span and dies hard then—jarred upon young Joslin, and he snubbed every appearance of it at the Dragon till it ceased, at all events in his presence. "He don't ca'are for she:" "hur's too fine for he," the Stanacombe people said with their favourite disarrangement of the pronouns. And old Gridge was supposed to have hit the right nail on the head when he propounded with much chuckling, "George Joslin be so parlous fine he'self, he ca'ant bear another person as has got edication, and that one a ma'ade."

Be that as it may, no one at the Dragon guessed how often George Joslin thought about the London stranger; how in his daily work about the farm he would keep a watchful eye for the red umbrella; how in his sturdy, impenetrable heart he thought of the girl as Poppy.

Poppy! It was a pretty idea, suited to the sudden appearance of this girl in harvest weather. And yet, no true farmer loves the flower that thins and tangles his corn, and for all its brightness casts a slur on his land!

George would pull himself together with a shake, and turn to barn or field with fixed determination, only to find that ten minutes later his eyes were roving the landscape again in search of Poppy.

It was the old story, and I cannot explain it, though story-tellers are supposed to know everything.

All this while Miss Williams knew nothing of the interest she

excited. She was out-of-doors all day long, for the doctor had ordered her to make the most of her month's holiday. He himself had told her of Stanacombe and advised the sexton's lodgings, having noted all the advantages of quiet sea air, fresh milk and low prices, when on a visit to the rector a few years before. He might have made the little promontory a fashionable health-resort in no time, by telling his rich patients about it; but being a wise man, he continued sending Lowndes Square and Wilton Place to Torquay, and Tenby, and Llandudno, and kept Stanacombe in mind for poor people like Patience Williams.

Most days she took her dinner with her in a basket, which likewise contained a book and a piece of white work; for this was her season for sewing, when no dread of the "Inspector" haunted her leisure. She would start about ten o'clock, while the stone walls still threw a little narrow shadow westward, and make her way by rough tracks to one of the tiny bays that lie at the base of the Stanacombe uplands. Here Poppy could spend a whole day without interruption. The sheep let her pass close by without fear; the long-backed red Devon cattle, of whom, oddly enough, the London girl was no whit afraid, eyed her seriously, and allowed her to rub their ears; the gulls swooped close down, as she sat working, and then slanted away across the blue waters of the bay. The days were one long blaze of sunshine. Then slowly the sun began to drop behind the big hills in the west, and a little crisp sea breeze would spring up and ruffle the waves. It would be time then for the girl to gather together her belongings and stroll homewards to supper at old Gridge's cottage by the churchyard gates.

One evening—a day that George Joslin never forgot—a sudden shower came on at sundown; large, slow drops fell on the thick dust of the roads, and made round holes as if printed with a stick. George, passing the cross-roads, at the top of Cove Lane, on his way back from Polworthy market, saw the slight black figure, that could not be mistaken for a Stanacombe girl, coming quickly along, and slackened his pace that she might catch him up. For a minute or two the slope of the lane hid them from each other, just time enough for George to divest himself of his coat, and spread it on the rough seat of his tax-cart. To be sure it was a risky thing to present himself to his lady-love for the first time in his shirt sleeves, and she a Londoner, but the shirt was a good one—home-spun and home-stitched by old Mrs. Joslin's careful hands, and the board of the cart was narrow and hard. To the big rain-drops George never gave a thought. When Miss Williams came round the corner of the lane, the cart was waiting for her.

"May I offer you a lift?" asked George; "'tis likely to be a heavy drop of rain, and you've a long step home."

"I'm stopping at Mr. Gridge's, in Stanacombe," Poppy began, with a Londoner's incredulity that a strange man in a cart could know

who she was and whence she came. "If you are going that way——"

"Jump up, jump up," George said, holding out his hand to help her. "I know who you are very well, Miss Williams, and where you are lodging. You haven't discovered yet, maybe, how curious we are in Stanacombe, and what a lot we knows about our neighbours' business. Is that right?" and before the girl knew that she had consented, she was safe in the high cart, with George's coat tucked all round her, and her basket safe behind.

"But your coat? You have given it to me, and you are getting your arms and shoulders soaked," she expostulated.

George was an honest man, but it is wonderful how easily a fib will pop out on occasions, even with the most truthful. "It was so warm in tu Polworthy. I can't stand the heat in tu town of market days. I was born and bred in Stanacombe, where it's always breezy, so I'm glad to be rid of my coat," he answered, without hesitation.

It was well for Joslin's shoulders that the drive was barely a mile. But he was careless of rheumatism, and would have risked a far worse penalty to have prolonged this first unexpected tête-à-tête with Poppy which had come to pass so naturally; not at all in the elaborate manner that George had thought it over and tried to bring it about.

The young people chatted as easily as if Miss Williams knew no town-bred scruples about making chance acquaintances, and George had never received a hint from his mother that she hoped her daughter-in-law would be good, honest, country "cloam," not a piece of fine London china.

The young Board-School mistress was accustomed to meet plenty of people, and all her interests were in men and women and children; there were no other interests in her dingy suburb; and after a fortnight of old Gridge and little Susan, and country quiet, it was pleasant to make so well-spoken an acquaintance as George Joslin: who, for the very opposite reason, and because he knew nobody but the handful of Stanacombe people he had been born amongst and took for granted, was fascinated with this slim, delicate creature from another sphere, with her anxious eyes, her crisp, quick speech, and eager questions about country things.

"Had it been a good market at Polworthy?"

"Tu Polworthy," repeated George, with his local correction. "No, a poor market for sellers. Cattle and everything had gone at a very low price. A great show of beasts, and no one to buy them, for the drought had dried all the grass, and no one had a mouthful of pasture left."

"Had he been selling?" Miss Williams asked.

Mr. Joslin was glad to answer "No." He had only been in to Polworthy with his mother's dairy produce, which went always to the same dealer, and realised fortunately as high a price in proportion as the live-stock was at a discount. For his own part, he had looked

about for a Jersey cow, to make up their dairy number, but had seen nothing to suit him; and he confessed he would have cared little to take a strange cow home from such a lot as had been on view at Polworthy cattle fair that day. There had been suspicious appearances of disease in some of the fagged, over-driven looking herds that had come into market.

"Those are my Jerseys," he said, with pardonable pride, pointing with his whip to a herd of fawn-coloured cows in a field that ran along one side of the high road. "It is one of my fancies to breed Jersey cows; the prettiest cows to handle, and the best milkers and the safest profit all round that a dairy can have. Look at them, now," for two or three crowded against the gate of the field, and pushed their black noses through the bars; "they're so knowing, I believe they hear my voice half-a-mile away," and he gave a rub with the butt end of his whip, as the cart went slowly past, to the head of the nearest.

When Patience Williams pleasantly shook hands at parting, Joslin was moved to utter the request that had held him tongue-tied for the last five minutes of their drive.

"Aren't you sometimes very dull of an evening, Miss Williams? If you would care—if you would do us the honour—my mother would be so pleased to see you up at Pounders." And indeed his own satisfaction at the prospect made him forget that Mrs. Joslin had yet to be consulted.

"You know which Pounders is?" he went on. "If I brought a message from mother perhaps you would honour us so far as to come up to tea some evening, and see something of farm life, and I would see you safe home after."

Miss Williams smiled, and said good-bye without definitely promising anything, and Joslin drove away. It suddenly occurred to him that he was offering a good deal more on his mother's part than she might be inclined to perform.

As for Poppy, she was fairly pleased with her little adventure. She had missed human companionship in the Devonshire quiet, and though the talk had been of bullocks it had been an agreeable change. Mr. Joslin—he had told her his name—had spoken of showing her something of "farm-house country life." Poppy smiled at this a little sadly; did he think she had never seen anything out of London, she wondered?

Up at Pounders, George Joslin's little escapade was wearing a very different complexion to what it did either in his mind or Poppy's. The birds of the air carry such matters in a Devonshire village, and though he had passed through Stanacombe village apparently unnoticed, he had not been at home more than an hour before some kind friend had reported the whole affair to Mrs. Joslin—with additions more or less—and her son knew very well when he came down to supper that she had heard it.

It was useless to try and interest her in Polworthy prices when she was sniffing audibly under this new grievance, and clashing plates and teacups to indicate mental agitation. George eat and drank in silence, nerving himself for the explanation that was to come, and for the hundredth time wishing that Stanacombe gossip would let his affairs alone. But he might as well have wished the sea less blue, or the roads less stony, as such a radical alteration.

By-and-bye, when Susan had cleared away supper, and George had got out his pipe—his mother, meanwhile, in ostentatious dolefulness, sighing and "strigging" red currants for preserving—the young man began in would-be-confident tones:

"Mother, I want you to go down to old Gridge's to-morrow, and pay a visit to the young la—person that's lodging there—Miss Williams, from London."

"Eh?"

George was forced to repeat his sentence. It had come forth glibly enough at first, but on repetition it sounded self-conscious and constrained.

"My days!" said Mrs. Joslin. "And since when, I wonder, have you come to the conclusion that your mother hadn't enough to fill up her time at Pounders' Farm?"

"I know you're always busy, mother," George said gently; "but I thought, maybe, you'd manage to find time for this. The girl's all alone there; an orphan, and glad of——"

"A bit o' company, no doubt, that she jumped at yours so readily. Thank you, George, but I don't care to pick my acquaintances from strange people that go flinkin up and down the roads, on the look-out for a lift in a cart, or a chat with a lad, when they feel lonely. My sort have something better to do with their time!"

"Mother, you're quite mistaken! Miss Williams has been ill, and was sent here for change of air. She seems to work hard enough in London; that's what has knocked her up. I never spoke a word to her till this evening, when it was raining, and I offered her a cast as far as old Gridge's; and I thought——"

"Then you thought wrong," interposed Mrs. Joslin.

"That you'd, maybe, ask her here to tea some evening," George went on desperately, "and make her welcome. 'Tis uncommon dull in the cottage there, now the evenings are closing in, more especially for a Londoner."

"I tell you once and for all, George Joslin, that I'll have no Londoners at Pounders; neither will I go a-visiting Londoners anywhere at my time of life. If you choose to carry the girl about in your cart, to Polworthy an' back, 'tis no account o' mine; nor if you're a mind to waste your time in the dimmit (twilight), hangin' round Gridge's cottage, as I *do* hear; but you won't drag me into it, and that's final. And bum-bye you'll thank me!" with which Mrs. Joslin closed every argument.

"But she'll never let me know her on these terms," muttered George, miserably, letting his cat out of the bag.

George Joslin's Jersey cows had the plague. The news spread like wildfire through Stanacombe, and the direst details were added with every repetition of the terrible tale. All the pretty creatures were struck down—it was a judgment on Joslin for bringing in a strange strain of cattle that was never meant to take in Devon. Or they were all dead at a stroke. It mattered little which account was handed on, for sure if they were struck, they were as good as gone. No one had ever known a cure for the terrible "plague."

Some said that a herd of diseased cattle passing towards Polworthy had tainted the Jerseys, whose pasture lay along the high road. But a more favourite theory was, that keeping Jerseys at all in Stanacombe was one of Joslin's "foolish fancies," bound to come to grief; if by sudden plague, so much the more convincing to all the wiseacres who had long ago shaken their heads over it.

Of course the judgment was exaggerated on all sides; but the truth was bad enough, as the neighbours saw who crowded into Joslin's farm-yard, full of sympathy and curiosity, and inextinguishable gossip.

Two beautiful cows had been carried away to the trench at the bottom of the ten-acre, and buried under a cartload of lime. But another white heap had been left significantly near, for five more of the soft-eyed Jerseys lay sick to death in the byre, and so soon as the inspector should arrive from Polworthy, George knew that the fiat would go forth to have them all polled.

George looked ten years older as he passed to and fro in the yard. He was thinking less of his monetary loss than of the beasts' sufferings, for he had a tender heart for his animals, and the reproach of having brought the Jerseys to this strait lay heavy upon him. Their loud, painful breathing could be heard in piteous monotony through the yard, where the farm servants stood about uselessly, unable to help the sufferers in any way and unwilling, as the manner of servants is, to go about any other duties at such an exciting time.

And in the midst of this group of idlers, whom George had not the heart to disperse, as he stood himself a little apart with one hand across his eyes, appeared Poppy Williams, pushing through the men and coming straight towards the master. No sauntering, delicate girl under a red umbrella, as the Stanacombe farmers knew her, but a resolute woman, intent upon a woman's first mission of relieving pain in the weak and helpless.

"Mr. Joslin, will you let me see your cows? I'm not asking out of curiosity."

"'Tis no sight for you, Miss Williams; the poor beasts would only disgust you——"

"I must see them!" And Miss Williams pushed past him into the

shed. "Yes, it is just what I thought—I have seen it before. Now, will you let me tell you what to do to save them? Five years ago, when I was a girl in Buckinghamshire, my uncle's cows were all struck down with this pneumonia. They were as bad as this, and four had died. We had a dozen down when we tried this remedy, and we pulled every one through after that. I remembered that I had all the treatment written down in an old note-book that I brought with me here. Will you give it a trial, and save your cows?"

"Let them die in peace?" repeated Miss Williams, catching an objection from a murmur in the crowd. "Do you call that dying in peace?" And she pointed to the glazed eyes and quivering sides of the poor beasts before her, whose every breath shook their dry, fever-stricken bodies and ended in a faint groan.

"I came in to see if they looked like ours did," she explained to Joslin; "and they might be our own lot over again; but I believe I can save them if you'll follow my directions. It's worth trying, for the inspector would order them to be killed at once."

"God bless you! Tell us what to do," said George.

Well, they packed and douched, and rolled the cows in the hydropathic fashion which saved so many cows' lives when the plague visited the home-counties a few years back. Poppy called out her directions in her Board-School voice, sending the loungers hither and thither for cans of water, and for Mrs. Joslin's store of winter blankets and rugs, for strips of material to be torn into stout bandages by the women who crowded out from the house.

Before an hour was out the five cows were enveloped in the cold-water swathings of this hydropathic treatment; and by the time all the patients were rolled into shapeless bundles, it was necessary to repeat the treatment in the case of the first. And so on, and so on.

The sun was high in the mid-day sky, and presently Poppy sat down on the edge of the stone drinking-trough and put up her red umbrella for shade. The men were all working regularly now in that established routine which is the mainspring of success when you are dealing with such instruments as farm-labourers.

Just as she sat down, George came stumbling out of the cow-house as if he were blinded by the sudden sunshine, and caught hold of the wooden paling against which she leaned. There were tears in his eyes, and he choked as he tried to speak.

"What is it?" Poppy asked, starting to her feet as though she had relaxed her vigilance for a moment in sitting down. "Any fresh symptoms? any one of them sinking?"

"It is Brown Jessie. She's—she's all of a beautiful perspiration, and she licked my hand!" George said.

When the inspector arrived, Joslin's five cows were all doing well, and there was no question of polling them, nor of further use for the trench and the lime-heap in the ten-acre meadow.

"This is the packing treatment," said the inspector. "I've heard of it, but it haven't come within my experience before. It is a mercy you had knowledge of it, or you'd a had a very empty shed here to-night." And when he heard that the young London lady had introduced and directed it throughout, he whistled so loud and long that George blushed scarlet in the darkness of the cow-house.

Poppy had slipped away before the arrival of the great man, but she had satisfied herself that her patients were prospering; and she had taken advantage of George's occupation about "Brown Jessie," who was making the speediest recovery of all, to escape from his impending gratitude. And the next morning when Mrs. Joslin, in her Sunday black silk, stepped down to the sexton's cottage to call upon the Board-School mistress, she found old Gridge hanging over the gate in a state of flat despondency, the reaction from unwonted bustle; and learnt that Miss Williams's holiday was over, and that the Polworthy coach had carried her, an hour ago, out of Stanacombe on her first stage towards London.

When George Joslin came up to London in the autumn after all the harvest was in, and made out the dingy street in the dingy suburb where Miss Williams lived, he wondered that anyone who had once breathed Stanacombe air could exist there for a single day. When he saw the beautiful pink colour that came into Poppy's pale face as she recognised him, he marvelled still more.

In the dull weeks after her summer outing, Patience Williams had often thought of Stanacombe and the pleasant young farmer; of the scene in Pounders yard, and her own dramatic disappearance directly afterwards. She had wondered a little that no letter of thanks or acknowledgment had followed her, and had set Joslin down in her own mind as a trifle less nice than he looked. Indeed, she was just a little disappointed in him!

And now, on this dullest of dull afternoons, there came a rush of fresh air from Stanacombe, as George put down his little country hamper, saying: "My mother sent you this, and she thought you would like to hear how the Jerseys were getting on."

The Board-School authorities had notice at Christmas to provide themselves with a new head-mistress. And old Mrs. Joslin is wont to declare of George's wife that though "one of his fancies," she has turned out a "ra'are and good bargain." But then "to be süre" she was no Londoner after all, but a Buckinghamshire maid, that had been driven up to town through family misfortunes; though Mrs. Joslin mère forgets to add that her discrimination failed to discover this in the first instance.

And George calls his wife not Patience, but Poppy.

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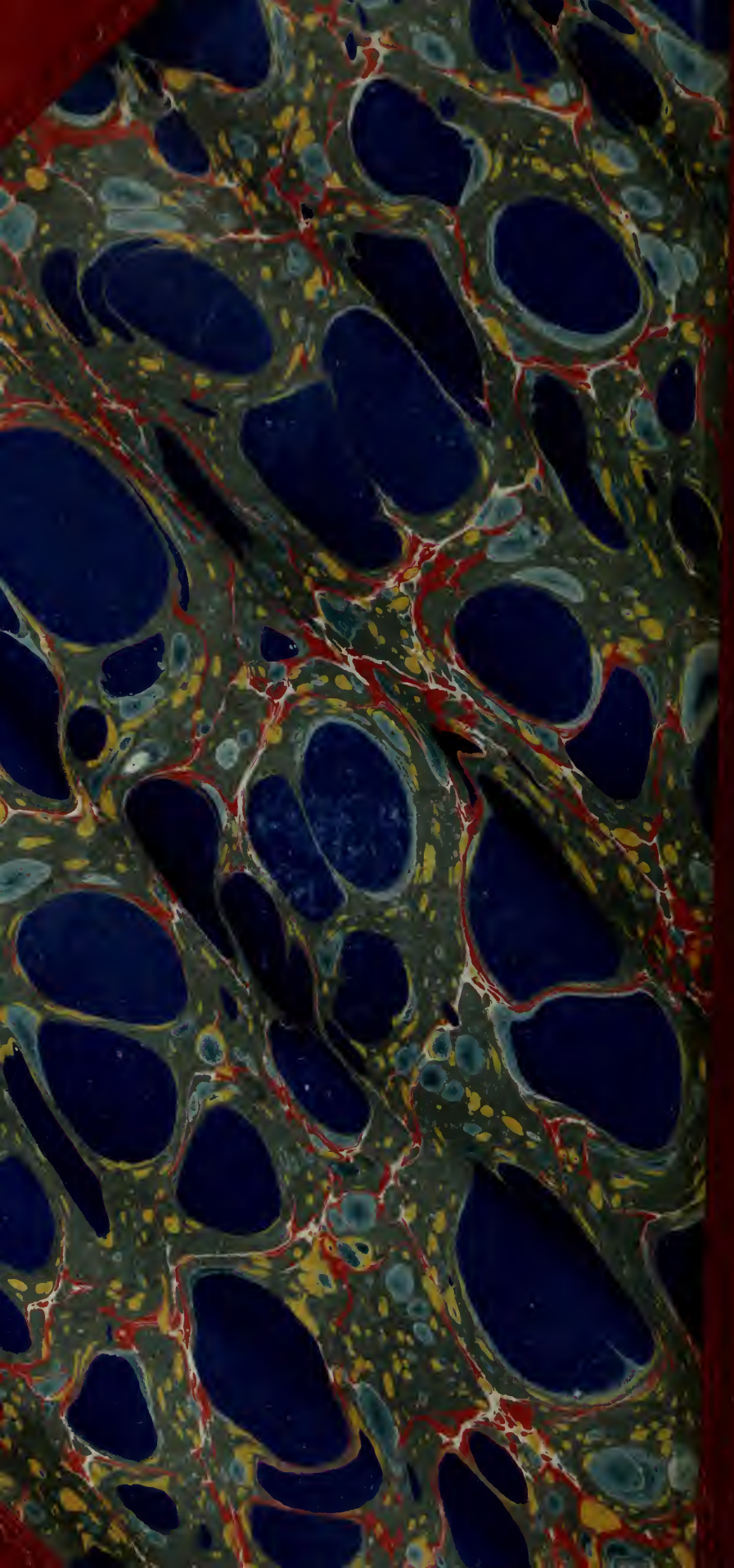
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